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["LIE STILL," SHE SAID, PEREMPTORILY, LAYING HER COOL FINGERS ON HIS FOREHEAD; "ARE YOU BETTER NOW?"]

THE MISTRESS OF LYWOOD.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE morning, a day or two later, Otho Lynwood suddenly announced that he was going up to town, and asked Adrienne if she had any commissions.

"You needn't be afraid of entrusting them to me," he told her, "for I am quite used to shopping with different ladies of my acquaintance, and I have got quite expert in detecting the qualities of silks and satins."

Adrienne laughed, but shook her head.

"I don't doubt you in the least, for I know your taste in dress is unimpeachable. At this present moment, however, I am so well provided with everything I want that I have nothing left to wish for."

"Happy girl!" sighed Otho. "How few there are who can say so much!"

Lady Lynwood blushed, and her husband looked at her with a fond smile.

"You should rather say how few there are

with such a contented disposition," he remarked. "Shall you be long in London?" he added.

"I really cannot say—it will entirely depend upon circumstances."

The nature of those circumstances he did not mention, perhaps his silence was politic.

On arriving in town he went straight to his rooms, where he changed his travelling suit for evening dress and at about nine o'clock got into a hansom, and was driven to De Vere Gardens, where he was evidently well known, for the footman at once admitted him.

"Is Miss Farquhar at home?" he inquired, as he gave up his hat and stick, and the light overcoat he wore.

"Yes, sir."

"And alone?"

"Yes, sir," again.

He was ushered into the room where Hugh had been taken on his first visit, and there he found Isabel, in her favourite half-reclining position, on the couch, reading a magazine—or rather pretending to read it, for it had dropped on her lap, and she was gazing into vacancy.

She started up as the door opened, and a bright light came into her eyes that Otho was not slow to observe; he noticed, also, that it faded almost immediately, and the thought came,—

"Did she expect anyone else?"

It disappeared, however, on consideration, for Captain Otho Lynwood had the bump of self-esteem pretty largely developed, and his experiences of women had been of such a nature as to give him a complete confidence in the power of his own fascinations.

"You are quite a stranger!" said Miss Farquhar, as she gave him her hand. "It seems ages since we last met."

"It can hardly seem so long to you as it has to me," he answered, bending down to kiss the slim white hand, and then seating himself by her side on the couch. "I need not say that only sheer necessity would have kept me absent from you for so long."

"And what shape may the sheer necessity have taken?" she demanded.

"I have been compelled to dance attendance on my uncle, Sir Ralph Lynwood."

"Ah, yes—he has married a young wife recently, has he not?"

Otho assented with a monosyllable, and there was a half quizzical look on Isabel's face as she pursued her inquiries.

"Rather a disappointment for you—wasn't it?"

"Of course it was, in a measure; still I am a philosopher, and, after all, money is not everything."

"It is a good deal, though—to say nothing of the loss of a title."

"An empty honour!"

"Do you think so? I confess I should not take the affair so coldly, but then I am not noble myself, and have, consequently, the love of a bourgeoisie for a handle to one's name."

Otho flashed a rapid glance at her. Were her words intended to convey a hidden meaning?

He could not tell, for her manner was sublimely unconscious, and she was playing with the fastening of the ruby and diamond bracelet she wore. Looking up, she met his eyes with a smile.

"Shall I give you a cup of coffee, or have you already had some?" she asked, rising, and going over to a table on which stood a silver tray, with a small spirit lamp, a coffee-pot, and an exquisite little service of Sevres china set out on it.

"I have not had any, for I rushed off here the very moment I arrived in town."

"That was too good of you. Indeed, I feel highly flattered at your coming to see me so soon."

"It was a most natural thing for me to do, seeing that my thoughts have been with you ever since I saw you last," he remarked, slowly.

She did not evince any surprise, but raised her well-marked eyebrows as if slightly amused.

"Is that really so? I'm afraid your sojourn in the country must have been rather dull then?"

"On the contrary. But it would have been the same wherever I might have been. You are not easily forgotten."

She made him a graceful, negligent courtesy as she resumed her seat.

"Thank you. I like having pretty things said to me. Most women do, I think, although few of them are brave enough to confess it. You have a happy knack of paying compliments gracefully."

"Have I? In the present instance I meant no compliment, but was simply stating a fact."

"I have had a good many 'facts' of the same kind stated to me by different men."

"No doubt; but, perhaps, few have said it with such sincerity as I do."

She shrugged her graceful shoulders, and a mocking light came in the brilliance of her eyes.

"I am not a child, Captain Lynwood, which is to say, I have lived long enough, and seen sufficient of the world to gauge men's sincerity pretty accurately; and I tell you candidly I have no faith in it."

She took up a fan of some tropical bird's plumage, and waved it to and fro in that slow, languid manner that was so peculiarly her own; and Otho thought to himself that Cleopatra must have looked something like this woman as she sailed under golden canopies down the Nile, with her "curled darling," Roman Anthony, at her feet.

As much as he could be in love with any woman he was in love with her. She was not beautiful, but there was a voluptuous grace about her that appealed to his senses even more strongly than mere beauty would have done. His heart, usually so regular and calm in its beatings, began to throb rather faster than usual, and his excitement rendered him oblivious of the warning her words were intended to convey.

She was, as she said, no child; and some instinct told her he had come that night with a definite object, and that unless she prevented it a scene would occur.

Her dramatic instincts were keen, and, as a rule, she did not object to scenes of this description, but to-night she had a reason for wishing to avoid one. Hence her words.

But Otho was too self-absorbed to be warned. He had been attracted to her at first by her great wealth, and now the necessity for his marrying an heiress had become greater than ever, and he resolved to make a desperate venture. Her money would, at all events, keep his head above water, even if all his hopes with regard to the Lynwood estates should be frustrated.

"In these sweeping assertions as to men's faithlessness you must make some exceptions," he said, replying to her last words. "May I hope I am included in the latter?"

"You place me in an awkward position by such a question. Shall I sacrifice veracity to politeness, or politeness to truth?"

"I had hoped that there would be no necessity for such a sacrifice, and that you would have believed in my sincerity, at all events!" he exclaimed, seizing her hand. "Isabel, I love you, have loved you for months. Will you be my wife?"

She quietly disengaged herself from his clasp, and moved a little farther away.

"I am sorry this has happened, Captain Lynwood—very sorry, but I really cannot blame myself. I like you extremely as a friend, but not enough to marry you."

Otho looked at her rather blankly. This had been the last answer he expected to obtain.

"But, Miss Farquhar—Isabel! You surely do not mean you refuse me unconditionally?"

"I am afraid that is my meaning, Captain Lynwood."

"Think over my proposal," she urged. "I will not press you for an answer now. I will wait as long as you like."

"Waiting would not make much difference. Six months hence I should probably say to you exactly what I say now."

"And if I had asked you six months ago, what then?" she said, with unconcealed bitterness. "Should you have given me the same answer?"

"Probably not," she replied, composedly, "but you must remember your position then was different to what it is now."

"And you would have taken that fact into consideration?"

"I daresay I should. You see I am candid with you, and I confess the prospect of a title would have had some influence with me. I should have liked to have been 'my lady.'"

"You may still be 'my lady' if you marry me. I am my uncle's presumptive heir."

"Yes, until he has children of his own, which may be almost regarded as a certainty. No, Captain Lynwood, I am afraid you can hardly count on such a remote contingency as Sir Ralph's dying childless. I hope, for your sake, it may be so, but for my part I should not be willing to risk the chance."

She smiled quite serenely as she said these words, and was apparently unconscious of the dark frown that had spread itself over Otho's face. She knew quite well that six months ago she had encouraged his attentions, and had fully purposed marrying him if he asked her; but since then not only had his position become changed, but a very important alteration had taken place in her own feelings. This latter fact, however, she wisely kept to herself.

"Then, since you base your answer on such a line of reasoning, it is useless to plead with you any more," he said, the frown still on his face.

"Utterly useless. I am, as I said before, very sorry this has happened, but perhaps it is better to have come to a full understanding with you. It will prevent any complications in the future when we meet, as we shall probably, for I am going to your part of the world very soon to be introduced to my prospective sister-in-law, Nathalie Egerton, and I believe the King's Dene people are intimate at Lynwood Hall."

After this Otho did not linger long, but bade her good-bye, and went out into the night, his heart overflowing with bitterness.

Now that she was out of his reach he over-estimated the affection he told himself he had felt for Isabel, and her fortune seemed even more tempting than it had ever done before. His loss of it and her he laid down to Adrienne's account, and his hatred for his uncle's young wife grew deeper and deeper—his determination to ruin her more fixed.

"If only Egerton were a different sort of man," he muttered to himself, as he walked in the direction of Piccadilly, not even attempting to console himself with a cigar. "But he is one of those chivalrous fellows who pride themselves on being above the reach of temptation. It would be easy enough to make my uncle jealous of him, but probably the only result would be he would take Adrienne back to Nice, or somewhere else, and afterwards the position would be precisely the same as before. I must adopt some more powerful method than that, but what shall it be?"

At that instant he ran up against someone who was turning a corner, and who cannoned against him with some violence.

"Why the deuce don't you look where you are going?" he exclaimed, angrily, and his voice betrayed his identity to the person, who paused, and looked up, thus disclosing the features of Mr. Phineas Hyam.

"Why, Captain Lynwood, you are just the very party I wanted to see!" said that worthy. "Which way are you going?"

"Not the way you are," returned the officer, shortly.

"Then I'll turn back and make it my way," eagerly murmured the Hebrew. "Meeting you like this has saved me a journey, for I was going down to Lynwood to-morrow on purpose to see you."

"Indeed!"

"The fact is, sir, I want money."

"So do I, my good friend."

"And what's more," continued Hyam, "I am determined to get it. I've given you plenty of grace—too much, in fact; and you've taken advantage of it. You haven't treated me like a gentleman; in fact, you've treated me dreadfully badly."

"Then I've treated you as other people have treated me," replied Otho, with a reckless laugh.

"That's not here nor there. My business is to get my money, and get it I will."

"Can you squeeze blood from a stone?" demanded the young man, with fierce bitterness, and in that reckless mood when plain-speaking and the truth seemed easiest to tell. "If you were to give me ten thousand pounds for doing it I could not raise twenty sovereigns at the present moment."

Hyam's yellow face grew paler.

"What about your marriage with Miss Farquhar, the heiress?" he asked, his voice faltering.

"That's all off."

The Jew wrung his hands.

"Then I shall go down to Sir Ralph, and tell him all!" he cried, desperately, as he saw his chances of being repaid the loans he had advanced thus ebbing away.

"That would be a fool's trick," observed Otho, laughing again—the same hard, mirthless laugh as before; "my uncle would tell you it served you right to lose money advanced at such an exorbitant rate of interest, and would have you turned out of the house; so you see you would gain nothing by such a step. No, Mr. Phineas Hyam; we are both in the same swim, and if, as I am afraid, I'm sinking, why the probabilities are you'll sink too."

In his present mood his chances looked so desperate, and he was so entirely depressed by Isabel's refusal, that he cared little what he said. If Hyam liked to sue a writ against him let him do it, and let the scandal reach his uncle's ears. It would be just the same to him.

Perhaps the Jew, in his manifold experiences of human nature, understood the mood, and felt sure his client was telling the truth. To arrest Otho would be a very slight satisfaction, for it would bring his money no nearer to him than it was at present.

"The only consolation I can give you is that Sir Ralph's wife may have no children, or she or Sir Ralph himself may die."

"Yes," repeated Hyam, softly, and meeting the officer's eyes; "they may die—one of them, and then you would be a rich man. Come home with me, Captain Lynwood, and we'll talk the matter over."

CHAPTER XXV.

Soon after Lynwood's departure another visitor came to De Vere gardens, and was allowed to find his way, unannounced, to Miss Farquhar's boudoir. If there was anything strange in Isabel's receiving gentlemen visitors as she did, she thought little of the fact, and cared less, for anyone more thoroughly unconventional it would have been difficult to find. She often declared etiquette was made for people who had no desire to enjoy their lives; and she, who lived every minute of hers so intensely, laughed at the idea of hedging herself round with those social laws to which Englishwomen bowed with blind obedience.

"Welcome!" she exclaimed, coming forward to meet Hugh Cleveland—for it was he—"I was afraid you would not come."

"I had some difficulty in getting away from the Carlyons," answered the young man, smiling at her friendly greeting; "they pressed me very hard to stay, and I had to plead a most important business engagement—though whether they believed I had business engagements at this time of the evening is quite another matter."

The coffee was still on the table, and Isabel poured out a cup, and handed it to him with a bewitching grace that was not lost upon him.

A change had come over Hugh since we saw him last, and its influence may certainly be ascribed to Miss Farquhar. At first he tried to decline her invitations; and excuse himself on various pretexts from coming to see her; but she was pertinacious, and would accept no excuses—she had set her heart on his subjugation, and it is very difficult for a man to resist the entreaties of a charming woman, who at once flatters his vanity and can meet him on the same intellectual level.

Little by little he yielded—at first reluctantly, and then gladly, for he felt that she was really doing him good, as, in effect, she was. She had succeeded in rousing him from the state of semi-lethargy in which Nathalie's desertion had plunged him, and reawakening his dormant energies and slumbering ambition. Once more he took an interest in his work, an interest that she shared, for most days she visited his studio to see, so she said, how his picture was progressing, and to cheer him on with words of encouragement and admiration—sometimes suggestions too, for her artistic taste was as great as his own.

The interest she took in his picture was a very natural one, for not only had she suggested the *motif*, but she also sat to him for one of the principal characters—Eleanor, as she offers the poisoned cup to fair Rosamond.

The subject was a hackneyed one, but he was treating it in an original manner, and it bade fair to be a most powerful picture. Isabel predicted it would make a sensation at next year's Academy, and he told her that if it did he should have her to thank for his success.

He had no relatives in London and few friends, so he was able to estimate at its true value the privilege of being able to drop in at De Vere gardens when he liked, and where he was always sure of finding a welcome, and a bright smile from a pair of dark eyes, that grew more lustrous at his coming; for Isabel made no effort to conceal her pleasure in his

society, and he was not insensible to the subtle flattery her manner conveyed.

"Do you know," he said, as he sipped his coffee, "you are spoiling me completely?"

"Am I?—as how?"

"Well, when I went home last night, I thought my rooms had never looked so dreary and unhomelike; they quite disgusted me, and I can only attribute it to the fact of having spent the evening in a place where feminine influence was visible everywhere, and where feminine hands had been at work."

She smiled, well pleased.

"You know you can come here when you like."

"Yes. But you must not make me too fond of coming here, otherwise my work will suffer; too many indulgences are not good for one."

As he spoke he put his hand to his brow, and she was quick to observe the gesture.

"Have you a headache?" anxiously.

"The merest suspicion of one. If you would play I think you would charm it away."

She sat down to the piano immediately, and her white fingers wandered over the keys, evoking soft harmonies that were as subtle in their effect as the spell Vivian cast upon Merlin.

Hugh leaned back on the cushions of the couch, feeling a delightful sensation of luxurious ease steal over him. The room was, as usual, full of the perfumes of flowers, and lighted by shaded lamps of ruby glass, which bathed everything in a soft, roseate glow. In the distance, behind the velvet curtains, the fountain plashed musically in its marble basin, making a running accompaniment to Isabel's playing; while she herself, clad in long flowing garments of white and gold, and with a broad gold belt around her waist, and gold-coloured roses in her hair, looked like the presiding genius of some scene of Eastern magic.

Presently she rose from the piano, and came over to the couch.

"Lie still!" she said, parenthetically, as he attempted to raise himself; and, as if to enforce her command, she laid her cool fingers lightly on his forehead. "Are you better now?"

"Quite well; there is some spell in your music that never fails in its effects. I wonder what the secret is? You have lulled me into a *dolce far niente* sort of state that must resemble the lotus-eater's."

"Then stay in it. One should always strive to prolong pleasurable sensations, for life does not offer us too many. My philosophy is that of Horace—to 'take the goods the gods provide.'"

"And what about the consequences?"

"Oh they must look after themselves—sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. I believe there are really very few people in the world who know how to be happy. They are continually regretting the past, or fearing the future, and meanwhile the present slips away from them, and the opportunity is lost. I can never say that of my life, for I do not think I have ever let slip a chance of happiness, and I certainly do not intend to do so now."

A peculiar expression came in her eyes as she let them rest on his face, but he could not fathom its meaning, and she threw a cushion on the ground, and knelt on it, so as to bring herself on a level with him.

The position, which would have surprised him in anyone else, seemed quite natural in her. She had accustomed him to seeing her do things that other people did not do, and she contrived to infuse such a grace in the way she did them that her innovations, instead of being *outré*, were invariably graceful.

"Do you not agree with me," she added slowly, and after a pause, "that people—men and women—are very foolish who let conventional or social barriers stand in their way to happiness?"

"Yes, I do."

"And your sex cannot feel the hardship of it as mine does," she went on, the light playing fitfully on the starry and crimson radiance of her bracelet, as she turned it round so that the rays of the lamp caught the rubies and diamonds. "Men are so infinitely more privileged than women, and have so much more liberty in every way, and yet in certain respects they, too, are shackled. For instance, suppose a poor man loved a rich woman, ten to one a mistaken idea of honour would prevent his telling her so."

"But would it be a mistake?" asked Hugh, thoughtfully. "A man would be looked upon as an adventurer if he proposed to a girl who was an heiress, and I must say that, for my part, I should feel inclined to regard him as one too."

"And yet he might be a hero, who was sacrificing his preconceived notions of honour for the sake of love. I sympathise with the man in such a case, for if he acted otherwise, the happiness of two lives might be ruined, unless, indeed, the woman took the initiative and proposed to him, as queens do to their consorts."

"Such things have been known."

"Yes, and will be known again," she said, a deep carmine flush dyeing her cheeks, while her eyes were hidden by the long dark fringes of her lashes. "There are some instances where one may forget one's sex and rise superior to its weaknesses, and throw all considerations to the winds before the grand devotion of one's heart! It is not many women who are capable of it, but there are a few."

Cleveland coloured, and shifted his position uneasily as she raised her eyes and they met his. There was something in them that he had never seen before, or if he had seen had not noticed; and in a moment a full comprehension of its meaning flashed across him, almost stunning him by the suddenness of the revelation. He felt dazed, bewildered, like a man in a dream, but he could not withdraw his gaze from her face.

Her hand fell down, and rested on his, the fingers twining close round his own.

"Why should we beat about the bush any longer, when it is so much better for both to come straight to the point?" she said, her low voice hardly rising above a whisper, and sounding infinitely sweet in its wooing tenderness. "I am rich, but I should only look upon my wealth as a curse, instead of a blessing, if I allowed it to stand between me and the man I love. There is such a thing as false delicacy, and it has wrecked many lives, but it shall not wreck ours, Hugh."

The spoken name was absolutely a caress, and she drooped her head until it rested on his shoulder.

"I know you are noble-minded enough not to misjudge me or my motives; and so, with this knowledge added to my assurance of your love, I bare my heart before you, and confess you as its king!"

For a few minutes the artist was absolutely incapable of speech; his brain seemed to whirl, his whole being was in a tumult, while a thousand thoughts and ideas flashed with lightning like rapidity across his mind.

The temptation to yield was a great one. In the first place, he was touched to the soul by Isabel's disinterested affection; and if she had lowered his ideal of womanhood by coming down from the pedestal of modesty, on which he had set her, it was not for him to blame that which was done for his sake. How different was this love from that of the girl who had deserted him—who had not been able to withstand the test of poverty, to which she would have been subjected as his wife!

Why should he not take that which was offered him? why should he condemn himself to a lonely, loveless life, because the woman to whom his heart was given, could never be his?

Isabel was young, gifted, charming, and wealthy—above all, she cared for him, and was eminently calculated to make any man happy.

"Take her," said the tempter. "Think what a triumph you would have over Nathalie Egerton; think how pleasant it would be to be master of a fine house, horses, carriages, servants, as much money as you wanted, and a fascinating wife into the bargain! Fortune offers you a prize, and you are worse than a fool if you refuse it."

Then some nobler instinct rose within him, and conscience whispered its warning.

"Do not yield—be true to yourself and your better nature. If you married her you would be taking a mean advantage of her generosity, for you do not love her—you never will love her. She would give all, and you would give nothing. In spite of everything, your heart still belongs to Nathalie Egerton, and will belong to her till the day of your death."

Isabel was at first too self-absorbed to notice his silence, but presently, she raised her head, and looked at him, and then a sudden chill seemed to sweep across her face, and her hands clenched themselves together spasmodically.

"Why don't you speak?" she exclaimed, a little wildly. "Have you nothing to say?"

"What can I say?" he returned, averting his eyes. "I would cut my tongue out rather than wound you in any way, and yet—"

"And yet you cannot help it. Is that what you mean?" she demanded, her voice losing all its former sweetness, and becoming harsh and shrill.

He bowed his head.

"Miss Farquhar, I have been to blame—I confess it; but I could not possibly foresee—"

He came to an abrupt pause, which she filled in with a little mirthless laugh, and then he continued more rapidly.

"I thank you a thousand times for all your goodness; I look upon you as one of the noblest, bravest, kindest of women, and I shall value your friendship as my dearest possession, but—"

"You do not love me! That is what you mean, I suppose?"

"If you were less noble and generous than you are I might contradict you, and declare I did," he said, gravely, taking courage as he proceeded, but feeling that man was never before placed in such a painful and awkward position. "Fortunately, or unfortunately, as the case may be, I esteem you too highly to attempt such a deception. Love is not a matter of will; it is fate, and sways everything by its own power. It is not gratitude, or admiration, or respect, or liking; if it were, then I could lay it at your feet; but as it is, I can only confess my heart is given to another woman; and, although she has behaved badly to me, has, in fact, thrown me over for the sake of a richer man, I cannot take back what I have given, and she must ever remain the one love of my life."

It was a noble speech, but she to whom it was addressed recognised no nobility in it at that moment. She was only conscious of an agony of shame, and humiliation, and wounded pride that scorched her like a burning fire. Above it all was a jealous rage that found a partial vent in her next words.

"And this woman is the Nathalie Egerton to whom my brother Gilbert is betrothed!"

Cleveland started in surprise.

"How did you know her name?"

"That is not to the point; confess I am right."

"I see no reason why I should deny it," he said, after a moment's pause of consideration. "Your brother can hardly feel otherwise than flattered that she was so ready to desert me for his sake."

"My brother will know nothing about it—from my lips," she responded, coldly, making a supreme effort to recover her self-possession, and partially succeeding.

She rose to her feet, and as she stood upright before him he saw that her face was deadly pale, and circles seemed, even in this short space of time, to have become hollowed beneath her eyes.

"May I ask you to leave me, Mr. Cleveland? I am tired and agitated, and shall be best alone."

Without a word he got up, and, after raising her hand to his lips, went out silently.

No sooner had he gone than the mask she had worn before him dropped from her face, and a dozen different emotions were depicted upon it.

She threw herself on the couch, burying her head in the cushions, while deep sobs, mingled with wildly incoherent words, broke from her lips.

She felt no shame—hardly regret—at having been betrayed into a confession of her love for Cleveland, and, strange to say, that love was stronger than ever; for his conduct, humiliating as it was to her vanity, yet gave striking proof of the manliness and nobility of his character, and, in spite of the bitter blow he had dealt her, she felt a certain exultant pride that he was not swayed by the mercenary motives which actuate so many of his sex.

Money, that most powerful tempter, had been powerless to shake his fealty.

All her anger, her jealousy, were directed against Nathalie, who, unknown as she was, she already hated with an intensity and virulence that it is almost impossible to describe.

She hated her because she had jilted Cleveland; she hated her because she was beautiful; most of all she hated her because Hugh loved her; but for all that, her longing to see her grew intense. She wanted to see what manner of woman her rival was.

Long into the night she lay on the couch motionless; and at last, when the grey dawn was breaking, she rose up shivering, and went to her bed, there to toss restlessly about till her maid came into the room, and the business of another day had commenced.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OTHO LYNWOOD was only absent from the Hall two days; and Sir Ralph, who had expected the attractions of London would have proved more irresistible, looked a little surprised to see him back so soon.

"I'm like a bad penny—if you'll pardon a somewhat hackneyed metaphor," remarked the soldier with a forced smile, when his uncle expressed his astonishment that his absence had not been longer; "and as a matter of fact, I found town insufferably dull—everyone was either away or on the point of departure. The season has been a short one this year."

"And not a very brilliant one either, if one may judge from the society papers," added the Baronet, in whose study this conversation took place. "I suppose next year I shall have to have Adrienne presented, and for her sake shall spend a month or two in town. I must get the family diamonds from the Bank, and have them reset, so as to be ready for her."

Otho winced. He had long looked upon the diamonds—which were exceedingly valuable gems—as his own, and predestined them for the payment of sundry debts when he should succeed to the baronetage, and be in a position to meet his liabilities. Each reminder of the change in the aspect of affairs since Lynwood had a mistress was bitter to him as wormwood.

"Were the diamonds mentioned in your wife's marriage settlement?" he asked, with an assumption of carelessness.

Sir Ralph looked surprised.

"We had no marriage settlement—I thought I told you."

"If you did I had forgotten it. I do not know that the settlement is of any consequence, after all, for of course Adrienne's future will be secured by your will. By-the-way, have you given Strange instructions yet for preparing it?"

"No, I thought I would wait for another month or two before doing so on account of certain leases that are in process of renewal,

besides which I intend selling some of those outlying lands beyond the Hall estates, and investing the money in the purchase of the Lodge Farm, which will soon be in the market, and which will be a most valuable acquisition to my property."

An expression of intense relief came in Otho's eyes, but his uncle was looking another way, and so it passed unnoticed.

"You are very wise," he observed; "it is much better to have these sort of matters quite plain and straightforward."

"So I think," returned the Baronet; then he added, laughing, "I don't intend the lawyers should have a chance of dividing my estates between them after I'm dead, because some clause in my will is not so clear as it might be. It is not wise to put off doing important things as a rule, and I'm not given to procrastinating, but in this instance I can't very well help myself, and I don't suppose I'm likely to die just yet."

"Indeed, no—I hope not!"

"At all events, I don't feel very like it. I think I'm good for another twenty years at least," said Sir Ralph; and, indeed, he looked the very picture of health as he stood there, in his favourite tweed shooting-jacket, and with tan-coloured gaiters—the beau ideal of an English country gentleman.

Otho's heart sank—his chances of succeeding to the Lynwood estates seemed so very remote, and he left the study rather abruptly. In the hall he encountered Adrienne, who had on her hat and mantle.

"I'm going for a walk to the Dene Woods," she said, smiling at him, as she drew on her gloves.

"Alone?"

"Yes, Sir Ralph has an appointment with one of his tenants, and can't leave home this morning."

"I won't offer to accompany you, for I am going to be rather busy myself. But why have you chosen the Dene Woods? Are you anxious to have your fortune told by the old woman who croaked so dismally the other day?"

Adrienne shuddered.

"No, indeed. I should not venture there if I did not know that all the gipsies were gone, Rebecca with them. I want to get a particular sort of fern for my rookery, and it grows in the Dene Woods, but nowhere else."

"Which way are you going?" asked Otho, a sudden interest in his manner.

"Along the road. I know no other way."

"I can tell you a much prettier one—by the riverside, and it is nearer too, to say nothing of its being cool and shady, which is a consideration this warm morning."

"Then I shall certainly avail myself of it."

Otho went to the end of the terrace with her, explaining the route, which was quite unfamiliar to her; and then she set off, taking with her Sir Ralph's last present, a huge St. Bernard, who looked big and strong enough to prove an efficient protector.

After she had gone a little distance she was very ready to acknowledge that Otho had been right in saying this way was prettier than the road; it was wild and uneven, certainly, but extremely picturesque, and led along the cliff by the side of the River Dene.

Besides its rural beauty, it had the merit of being entirely private, and Adrienne did not meet a soul all the way. At last she came to a light bridge thrown across from one cliff to the other, and partially covered with ivy. It looked old and shaky, and as if it were rarely used, and yet there seemed no other method of crossing the chasm, which was a very deep one.

Adrienne shuddered as she looked down and saw the jagged, pointed rocks, and the river foaming over great boulders, and pictured to herself the fate of any unfortunate who should slip down; inevitably they would be dashed to pieces against those cruel stones.

She missed the dog, who had lingered behind to investigate something that presented

points of interest to his canine mind, and so she turned round to call him.

"Fritz! Fritz!"

He answered with a deep bay, and came bounding up, wagging his tail penitently.

"You go first, sir, and pilot the way," said the young girl, pointing with her finger across the bridge.

The animal put his forefeet very carefully on the plank, then turned and looked at her with an expression of almost human intelligence and reproach in his large brown eyes.

"Go on!" she commanded, preparing to follow; but just as the dog reached the middle of the plank it gave way, and, to her horror, she saw him fall into the bed of the river below.

Luckily she had as yet only placed her one foot on the bridge, and of course, instantly drew back on witnessing the accident, uttering an involuntary cry of terror, that was stifled by the intensity of her anxiety, as she bent down over the side of the cliff to see what fate had overtaken poor Fritz.

By the merest chance he had missed the rocks, and fallen into the very middle of the stream, from whence he was able, with very little difficulty, to swim to the bank, and in a few minutes he had shaken his coat, and, after scrambling up the rugged face of the cliff, was soon at his mistress's side.

Regardless of his dripping condition, Adrienne fell on her knees, and threw her arms about his rough neck.

"Oh! Fritz-Fritz! I am so glad you are saved. I should never have forgiven myself if you had been killed, although it would not have been my fault!" she exclaimed, and then rose and retraced her steps homewards, for she felt too shaken by the accident to think of continuing her walk to the wood.

She was very thoughtful as she walked back, for a strange doubt would obtrude itself on her mind. Innocent and unsuspecting as she was, she was not deficient in penetration, and it struck her that Otho Lynwood must have known the bridge to be unsafe. Suppose she had crossed it first instead of the dog!

She turned sick and giddy at the thought, and did her best to dismiss it, telling herself that it was impossible the young man could have known anything about the rotten condition of the woodwork, and that she wronged him deeply by so awful an idea. Still, there are some instincts stronger than reason, and this sudden mistrust of her husband's nephew was one.

Close to the Hall she met the soldier himself, in company with Lionel Egerton, and she noticed that, as he saw her, the former grew deadly pale, and put up his hand to his mouth with a gesture peculiar to him, and indicative of intense nervousness.

Lionel did not observe it, for his eyes were fixed on Lady Lynwood, who had not yet recovered from the effects of her fright, and whose face was quite destitute of colour.

"Are you not well?" he said. "I ask because you look so white."

"I have had a shock," she returned, gravely, and thereupon gave a detailed account of what had happened.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Egerton, who was considerably agitated at the recital. "You have, indeed, had a narrow escape. The bridge was condemned as unsafe some ten years ago, and has never since been used, but my father would not have it demolished because it used to be a favourite haunt of my mother's, besides being in itself very picturesque. Another and more substantial one was constructed a little distance off, but it is seldom or never used, for the best way from here to the Dene Woods is under the cliff, not over it."

"I did not know that," said Adrienne, looking steadily at Otho. "I was told to cross the bridge; and, of course, I was not aware there was more than one bridge—no mention of a second was made."

"My dear Lady Lynwood, if you had gone the way I directed you, you would not have been near the unused one!" interposed the

officer, partially recovering his self-possession, although he was still very white. "I do not think it is fair of you to blame me for what must have been a mistake on your own part!"

"I do not blame you," she replied, simply; and then, with a slight bow to Lionel, she passed on towards the house.

After she had gone, the two men stood where she had left them, Otho moodily tapping his cane on the ground, Egerton watching him. At last he looked up with an uneasy laugh.

"Well, have you done studying my face?" he demanded, with an assumption of ease he was very far from feeling. "What do you think of it?"

"I think," said Lionel, deliberately, "it is the mask of one of the blackest hearts that ever beat in human body."

For a moment Otho seemed so absolutely astounded by the words as to be incapable of speech, then he raised his cane threateningly, but with a blow of his own Egerton knocked it from his hand, and it fell some distance away.

"Are you mad?" exclaimed the officer, his eyes flashing fiercely; "or what do you mean by such language?"

"I mean what I say, nothing more or less, and if you ask me why I think so, I tell you that I believe you have twice done your best to compass the death of your uncle's wife, and that you are at heart as much a murderer as if you had plunged a knife in her body."

He pronounced the words steadily and deliberately, as if he had well weighed their import, and Otho staggered back and put his hand before his eyes, for a moment too overcome to reply.

But his self-possession rarely deserted him for long, and he recovered it all the more quickly as he felt the imperative necessity of it in this emergency. Egerton, he knew, was not a man to be trifled with, especially in a case like the present, and he was looking at him with a gaze as stern as that of some relentless and avenging deity.

"By Heaven!" he will make you answer for your words!" he exclaimed, in a low, hoarse voice. "No man shall accuse me of such a crime and go unpunished."

Lionel made a gesture of contempt.

"There is no necessity for these heroics with one who knows you as well as I do," he said, scornfully. "I have told you what my opinion is, and if I had sufficient proofs of your guilt I should go straight to Sir Ralph and lay them before him. As it is, I have simply moral conviction, and so I do not feel justified in taking such a course of action, but I have spoken to you thus with a view to the future. Lady Lynwood is in your way, and her removal would be your gain; so much is clear, but I warn you that henceforward I shall constitute myself the guardian of her safety, and if harm come to her, shall hold you responsible for it."

"I do not understand this melodramatic nonsense. Your brain must be giving way under the pressure of reading too many novels, I should imagine," rejoined Lynwood, with a bitter sneer.

"Melodramatic or not, I mean every syllable I have uttered, and, what is more, you know I do. I have put you on your guard, not for your own sake but for Lady Lynwood's, and you are quite well enough acquainted with me to be aware that I am not in the habit of making vain boasts or empty threats," said Egerton, turning on his heel and walking away.

Mentally he wondered whether he was doing right in not seeking Sir Ralph, and telling him his suspicions of Otho. Was it not a duty he owed to Adrienne to do so?

Finally, however, he decided in the negative; for, after all, as he had said, he had no legal proofs of the officer's culpability; and the baronet, whose trust in his nephew was very great, might declare his idea to be the imagining of a diseased brain. As it was, he had shown Otho that Adrienne had a protector, and

he did not think her safety would be again endangered, more especially as, from her manner, she, too, seemed to have a distrust of her husband's nephew, and would, therefore, be on her guard against him.

Lionel's heart thrilled with horror as he thought of what would have been her fate but for the providential accident of the dog crossing first.

He pictured the fair dead face, the mangled limbs, and a prayer of thankfulness went up from his inmost soul that Heaven had been merciful and spared the young life from such a ghastly termination. His blood boiled with indignation against the villain who had done his best to send her to her doom, and involuntarily his hands clenched themselves together.

"There must be a great deal of the brute instinct left in me," he muttered, noticing the action; "for if I only had that man's throat between my fingers at the present moment, it seems to me I should squeeze the very life out of it, and feel I was but executing justice. And yet the only accusation I can bring against him is a moral one; he has done nothing of which the law can take cognizance; and some people would ignore the circumstantial evidence that, to me, seems so strong. Perhaps I should not attach so much importance to it, if I did not know the thoroughly unscrupulous nature of the man, to which crime is justified by self-interest. But surely he will make no further attempt now that he knows he is being watched!"

And comforting himself with this assurance Lionel returned to King's Dene, from whence Mr. Farquhar that day took his departure.

(To be continued.)

SAVED BY LOVE.

CHAPTER VII.

For a moment a dark frown like a midnight cloud surges into Esme's lovely face, a lightning born of wrath leaps from her eyes, while her pretty hands clench as if about to strike; for the southern blood in her veins is roused into fury by the pain his grip inflicts upon her.

Not for ten thousand worlds would she tell him what Oscar Viohe was to her in the past, and this resolve calms her wrath, standing as she does on the brink of a precipice, from which one single imprudent word might hurl her.

Looking up she sees a fire of mad jealousy in her eyes, and says, with a silvery laugh that, although forced, is as musical as the breathings of an Eolian harp.—

"What a Blue Beard it is! That man is nothing to me, Warren. He simply asked for a match to light his pipe, and I gave him your box of fuses. I don't think you need have hurt me so very much."

While speaking she holds out her white, shapely arm, where two bright red marks show how tightly he had gripped her.

"Can a temporary fit of jealousy have made a fiend of me?" he thinks, as he sees the evidences of his brutality. "What creatures of impulse we are! How ready to condemn before even a tittle of guilt has been proved!"

In his voice when he says, "Forgive me, Esme," there is a pleading so intense that it sounds like a sob.

"You are all the world to me, and your loss would mean utter ruin to my happiness and peace of mind. Come, my darling, let us forget the little incident, and strive to be happy on this the anniversary of our wedding-day!"

He kisses her with the warmth of a lover rather than of a husband; but somehow, in spite of his devotion, there falls upon her spirit a darkness that fills her with a nameless horror, and makes her shudder as if his kiss were preparing her for the darkness of the tomb.

"Come, Esme! Surely my little offence is pardoned?" he asks, coaxingly, seeing she does not reply, speech being denied her by the fear that has enveloped her in its icy folds.

Looking him furtively in the face she replies,—

"If a supposed fault meets with such severe punishment, what would you mete out to a real offender?"

"Love ought to cast out all fear," he answers, with a contrite look in his gentle eyes.

"Yes; but love also ought to think no evil—not shatter its idol with a blow—the outcome of injustice. Oh, Warren, perhaps it would be as well if we had never met. I want someone to trust me implicitly—to be a shield to me against the world—to believe me when everything points to guilt even. Can you truly be all this to me, Warren? Can I lean upon the staff of your love without finding that it is a broken reed which will pierce me through and through?"

"Can you doubt my love?" he asks, reproachfully.

"Yes, with such proofs before me as these," again showing her arm, where bruises give place to redness.

"Oh, my darling, forgive and forget!" he cries, straining her to his breast; while the river goes by murmuring soft cadences that lull the spirit of men to repose.

"But, Warren, I fear you are very, very jealous!" she says, archly, "and ready to believe all kinds of dreadful things about me; but I suppose you are to a certain extent influenced by your lady-mother?"

He winces somewhat at the little shaft; but feeling he had been unjust to his lovely wife says tenderly,—

"She could never do that, Esme. Have I not shown you my devotion?"

"Yes, so far as leaving Croylands, I'll admit; but, come, Warren! confess, is there not a wee bit of Lady Croyland's prejudice as regards poor Esme? Do her bitter words not rankle in your heart at times?"

"No, I give you my word upon that. As my wife I would defend you against all enemies, whether of my household or not, and believe in your innocence and truth against the world, except proof as strong as confirmation of holy writ were forthcoming.

"Dear husband, I am satisfied," she murmurs, kissing him fondly, and wondering, half vaguely, whether he will ever be put to the test.

Hand-in-hand husband and wife stroll in the garden, as if no cloud were hovering over them to imperil their happiness by dark, brooding misfortune, which might descend at any moment to crush all brightness out of their lives.

On the breakfast-table next morning lay a telegram.

"What is this?" Warren asks himself, nervously, as he reads,—

"Come to Croylands at once. Something has happened!"

"It is from my mother," he mutters. "I wish she had been more explicit! This reads like a veiled menace—a messenger of evil. I am innocent of having caused her any annoyance!"

And again, with weary iteration, he asks himself the question,—

"What does it all mean?"

"Why, Warren, you look as gloomy as a raven at a funeral!" says Esme, rather anxiously, entering the charming morning-room, looking pale, as if she had passed a restless night, but still as lovely as ever, in a rose-coloured cashmere gown, that floats in soft, fleecy folds about her graceful figure.

"Read that, Esme; it is so vague that I fear something unpleasant has happened. But how you tremble, my darling!" as he notes her agitation.

"Well, yes, I always fear something evil from Croylands ever since your mother tried so hard to separate us," she says audibly; but

that was all, for her voice seemed stricken with a sudden palsy, as did her limbs; she sinks so helplessly into a chair, and sits, telegram in hand, with a dazed expression on her face, and a look of wild appeal in her eyes.

"Have no fear, (Esme, dearest!)" he says soothingly, going over to her, and reassuring her with tender caresses, that smooth the wrinkles out of her white brow, and bring back the colour into her face.

"What can she want with you?" she asks dreamily, as if speaking to herself more than to him.

"I cannot say; something has happened; it may mean a lot or nothing. You will know where I am should I be detained the night at Croylands?"

"Oh! take me with you, dear Warren," she pleads, clinging to him with strange tenacity, as if imbued with a foreboding that they would never meet again.

"I can scarcely do that, Esme, considering how strained the relations are between us and Croylands. I vowed, when you were so summarily thrust forth, that you should not enter there again until my mother besought you on her knees almost. I cannot bear the thought that the woman I have made my wife should be treated with harshness; another such act, and I would be tempted to forget that I had a mother."

But his words bring her no comfort; she moans as if stricken to the heart by some invisible agency, and says,—

"You promised not to believe evil of me, Warren. Will you remember that when you meet her?"

So intense is her appeal that it amounts to a prayer, and impresses him with a secret dread that, somehow, she is connected with the message.

"I shall not forget that you are my wife," he answers proudly, "nor shall I permit even my mother to do so either. Your good name and fame will always be dearer to me than my life."

"Always?"

"Yes, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, always my treasured wife; let spite and malice do their worst."

A rush of joy surges into her face, and brings fresh life into her whole being; to hear him speak such words is to her like a divine promise of salvation.

But the whole fear returns when the door closes behind him.

"Gone," she murmurs brokenly; "will he ever return? Oh! my punishment is beginning already, but where will it end?"

"How anxious Esme was," he thinks, as he sits in the fast-speeding train; "surely she has not been writing any unpleasant letters to my mother? Pshaw! I am as nervous as a schoolboy about to be whipped. Better drop conjecture, and grapple bravely with anything the mater may have in store for me, when it and I come face to face."

"Croylands once more!" he muses, in no hurry to meet his lady-mother. "How delightful it all seems after the parching heat of London! There are the haymakers leading the waggons with the great oops, which I, in the happy past, have often helped to pile up, and my favourite resort is still the same—a coppice of fir-trees, where a path, slippery with brown, needlelike cones, leads to the little meadow, enclosed by woods, and sheltering hedges of rose-briar and thorn, where Blossom, my first pony, lived and died. Ah, me, it all seems but yesterday that Sis and I played hide-and-seek, and now she lies yonder sleeping, her life having been stolen from her by the treacherous beck, that now looks so smiling and peaceful."

"Her ladyship is in the library, my lord," says the butler, who has grown grey in the service of the family.

"Thanks, you need not announce me, Bates. How is Nurse Margaret?"

"Not at all well, my lord; she—" but here he pauses, for his mistress stands on the grand staircase looking as stern as Nemesis,

her face grey with anger, her eyes full of indignant reproach.

"Mother!" says Warren, stepping forward and greeting her with the same old look of love that once had been wont to warm her heart, but now found no response there.

Turning, she led the way into the library without exchanging a single word with him, and he realises from this that something more than unpleasant has occurred.

"What is the matter?" he asks, the question being forced from him by her strange manner, her weird silence, that alarms him more than he would care to acknowledge.

"Happened!" and the word sounds like the snap of a steel trap—it is so fierce, so full of menace.

"Mother are you ill, or what?" he asks, in perplexity.

"Al, boy! yes, not in body, but in mind. Woe is me—woe to our house since you its head, its only hope, have wedded a thief!"

"Mother, are you mad? Consider what you are saying—remember you are speaking of my wife, of a Croyland!"

"Look for yourself, infatuated boy," pointing to the old cabinet.

"What! the diamonds!" he gasps, staggering towards it.

"Yes, gone, and with it our prosperity."

"Too true," he says, brokenly, as he sees the empty casket. "Who could have done this thing?"

"Your wife!"

"No—no!"

"I say you!"

"The proof, mother—the proof! She has never entered Croylands since you told us both to leave."

"She would not tell you she was coming here to steal," Lady Croyland answers, with biting irony, that stabs him to the heart, and fills his very soul with humiliation.

"Mother—"

"Silence; I have no son, and you no mother, until she, that snake, restores the jewels."

"But I want proofs; aye, so overwhelming that even my love cannot stand forth in her defence."

"You want them, do you?" she asks, bitterly.

"Yes, yes; do not keep me in suspense!" and his voice is hoarse with emotion.

"Touch that bell, Lord Croyland, and when you see the wreck that old, faithful Margaret is, even you will be the first to condemn the heartless woman who betrayed the confidence placed in her by a mere domestic, one who could stoop so low as to bring suspicion upon an aged person fast hastening to the grave. Silence, again I say, lest I should be tempted to think you her accomplice."

"Margaret, my poor Margaret!" he says, taking the old dame's hand, and leading her to a chair. "I am so sorry to see you so ill."

"Ah, Master Warren, I fear the blow will kill me," she moans, as if in anguish of soul more than of body.

"Did my wife come to Croylands since I was here last?" he asks, nervously.

"Yes, only for a little while, but I cannot say whether she entered this room; it was locked, and the key hung with the others in my room. She has a bonny face, and I cannot believe her heart is black enough to commit such a crime."

"Thank you, dear old nurse," he answers, with difficulty suppressing a sob, for now he has no hope of proving Esme's innocence; and, as if to confirm her guilt, there flashes across his mind the recollection of the strange incident in the garden.

"What do you mean to do?" demands his mother, frigidly.

"Make her restore them," he answers, between his clenched teeth, his voice sibilant with anger and shame.

"But she may have parted with them. Oh! rash, foolish boy, what else could you expect—you who disobeyed me, who forgot the love of a mother, and cast her out of your

heart for the sake of a woman, whose crime will ever be a stain on the escutcheon of our family?"

"Parted with them! Oh, mother, do not make her crime blacker in my eyes than it is already! If she has taken them—"

"If, foolish boy! Can you doubt Margaret's word, or the loss of the jewels? Why, then, do you anger me with your if's?"

"Because, like a drowning man, I clutch at a mere straw of hope. I say, granted she took them, yet she was not actuated by any base or mercenary motive. Vanity is a weakness of hers. I will say no more now, except to beg of you both not to let this matter get about until you hear from or see me."

"Not even then would I disgrace our house by naming the theft to a soul, neither would Margaret, whom I hold blameless."

"Ah! my lady, I cannot think myself that," sobbed the poor old dame, "although I, knowing her to be a Croyland, never dreamt she would be a—"

"Stop, Margaret! say no more. I will bring back the diamonds, or my wife and I will be utter strangers henceforth and for ever more."

A wail so keen as to be startling burst from old Margaret's lips as Warren strode from the room, a bitter feeling at his heart that the woman he trusted with his love and the honour of his house should have played him false, and branded herself as a thief.

CHAPTER VIII.

No poor prisoner about to be tried for her life could have felt deeper anguish than did Esme when she realised that her husband had gone to Croylands.

"Am I a coward?" she asks herself, as an overwhelming dread assails her. "What can he do?—nothing. The diamonds were meant for me; no one else had any right to them. If I have committed any offence, it is out of love for Warren. I could not bear that he and Oscar should meet. Oh! how true is it that sin is sure to find one out. I will stay and trust to his love for me."

But as she watches the hands of the clock go round, and knows that within an hour or more her husband will return, not with love's smiles, but as her accuser and judge, she murmurs,—

"I cannot stay to meet him, to listen, perhaps to insulting words, to be given into custody. No. Oh! Oscar Vichi, you have to answer for all this. May you one day realise what it is to be driven forth an outcast from a loving heart and home. I would confess all and ask Warren's pardon and forgiveness, but I cannot face the gibes and sneers of his mother," she adds, seeking consolation in words, but finding none.

With eyes blurred, and wan face, so poignant is her grief, she leaves her home to wander whither she knew not and cared less, at the moment—a guilty conscience had made such a coward of her.

With stern-set, hard face, yet relenting at heart because he deems Esme unworthy of being termed a thief, Warren enters his home once more.

"Where is Lady Croyland?" he asks, with assumed carelessness.

"Gone out, my lord," replies the footman.

"Oh! that will do. When her ladyship returns say I am in the study."

"Come out!" he mutters, as a dark frown rushes into his face; "she might have stayed until my return. It looks so much like guilt, and I wanted to believe in her innocent intent."

Hour after hour passes, and still no Esme, although he keeps a faithful watch at the window overlooking the street.

"How can I face my mother?" he moans; "the loss of the diamonds is as nothing to that of my honour. Can Esme be mad, or what?"

In vain he asks himself these and a thousand other questions. No answer comes, no rift in the dark cloud to show him one ray of hope or comfort.

"If she has been tempted by any man, and my finger once clutch his throat, I will avenge both her and myself before I let him go."

This instinct of the savage soothes him more than aught else; and next day, a letter arriving for Esme in a man's handwriting, he opens it, thinking, perhaps, it might throw some light upon her whereabouts.

"This is something," he mutters, as he reads,—

"DEAR ESME,—I will be at the old place to-night to say good-bye before starting for Egypt. Thanks for your timely aid, which has enabled me to tide over my difficulties.—Yours always, "OSCAR VICHU."

"Now, my fine fellow, you shall reckon with me to-night, for you have led her into temptation; instead of the wife you shall meet an outraged husband, and feel the weight of my just resentment. No doubt she has gone to seek this scoundrel, and the letter has misled her. Oh! the treachery of woman! the black deceit of it all! And I deemed her as pure, as innocent as snow! Fool! rash idiot that I was to trust my all to her keeping!"

How eagerly he waits for the shadows to deepen into evening, for then he can have his revenge upon the man he feels assured has wrecked his happiness.

"Lost to me for ever!" he groans, in anguish of soul, as he takes up his station in the summer-house, where he and she have so often sat together hand in hand, speaking of a happy future when reconciled to his mother they would take up their abode at Croylands, and know no end to their happiness.

So intently does he watch, that more than once his imagination plays him a trick, and he glides towards the river silently and swiftly, only to find that it is an illusion, a phantom, conjured up by his excited brain.

"Will he never come? I have no weapon but my good right hand with which to smite him down. Oh! Esme, why did not my good angel warn me against you? Then I would not have sheltered you in my bosom only to find that, like the fabled adder, you repaid kindness by an act of base ingratitude and treachery."

These and other dark brooding thoughts pass through his mind as he crouches there ready to spring, afraid to police himself with a cigar lest he should betray his ambush.

"Was ever man's soul vexed like mine?" he thinks, as the moon rises out of her bath of silver and floods the world with light. "I must take up another position, so that I may spring upon him before he can escape, and then wring from him a confession of what Esme has been, or is now to him."

While a dreamy languor steals nature in its slurring folds, Warren Croyland's heart is like an angry sea casting up the mire of hate, ready to burst all bounds, and overwhelm and destroy.

"Hist! Esme, it is I, Oscar!" says a voice, as a man's head appears over the wall, and he waves a handkerchief.

From his hiding-place Warren catches a clear view of the man's face, upon which the moon is shining brilliantly, bringing into strong relief every feature.

So impetuous is Lord Croyland in his mad haste to grapple with Oscar Vichi that he stumbles over the roots of a tree, and, with a smothered imprecation, betrays himself.

When he recovers himself Oscar has gone as silently as he came, the flash of ears only breaking the evening stillness.

"Baffled! Just at a moment when victory seemed secure! But I should know that face in a hundred by the mark on his forehead. Some day, sooner or later, we are bound to meet. I will track him to Egypt, and, once found, will exact a fearful vengeance! To think that I have loved her so truly, so all-absorbing, that even now my heart refuses to

believe her as black as appearances paint her; but she has fled and he is here, what does it mean? Why, deceit to throw me off the scent."

"What is this?" he asks himself, as he picks up a little bunch of heliotrope and starry jessamine from the rustic table. "Ah! She plucked these flowers only two days ago, and they are withered already, like my life, just when I thought I had secured love and happiness. Can one so fair be false? Even now I think I can hear her honeyed words and feel her caresses. She pressed kisses upon you, ill-starred flowers, and you have died just as my love will. Shall I keep you in memory of her, or crush you under my heel?"

For some minutes love fights against hate for the ascendancy, and memory is charged with a flood of tender recollections that is almost overwhelming, and he presses his lips to the faded flowers because hers had rested on them in the happy past, which was so near to him that it seemed he had only to put out his hand to clutch it to wrest it from the grasp of oblivion.

But like a fierce tornado there rushes in upon this sweet dream the recollection of her treachery, and, with an angry scowl, he crushes the tender little flowers under his feet, muttering savagely,—

"Weak fool! There! so ends my dream of love, and trust in woman."

When the hurricane of passion had subsided, and he was once more amenable to reason, it dawned upon his awakened faculties that he had a duty to perform, the bitterest that could ever fall to the lot of man.

"A letter would answer the same purpose, and I need not meet my mother's look of keen reproach," he argues with himself, eager to get out of the bitter trial that awaits him, when face to face with her he has to confess that the woman who bears the family name is nothing more or less than a common thief.

"Come, Warren, be a man!" he apostrophizes; "you brought it all about by your wilfulness, and must bear your punishment. It will be sharp and swift, a veritable two-edged sword, piercing not only joints and marrow, but the soul also. It will bring its own cure, though; and the medicine, if nauseous, will brace up your shattered life, and for ever blot out the very memory of a love that was sweeter to you than all else life contained."

Once more mother and son stand face to face, not looking into each other's eyes with the old tender affection that made homecoming a delight.

"Well, my lord, I hope you have come to restore the jewels, this time to be placed where no one but I can touch them."

How can he tell her that his wife had fled, fearing to face the consequences of her guilt or his just anger?

"Why don't you speak? You took her part only a few days back, pledging your very honour upon the innocence of her intentions, while to-day you are dumb, speechless. Alas! I can read your answer in your face! Go, unhappy boy; you will be lord of Croylands in a few months' time; but son of mine again never, until you restore the diamonds and sever the tie that binds you to that shameless woman."

As if acknowledging the justice of his sentence he leaves her presence without a word, and with bowed head goes out into the world, an outcast from his mother's heart and love, bankrupt in everything that makes life dear.

CHAPTER IX.

"Ah! poor creatures, even you are happier than I," thinks Esme, as, seated listlessly at a window of a quiet family hotel leading out of Piccadilly, she watches the neat white-aproned flower-girls passing to and fro, laden with fragrant blossoms, their delf fingers tying little bunches ready for sale, humming merry catches of song to lighten

their work. "You have no weight of crime on your conscience, no husband to fear, no dismal future to face! What if Oscar were to go down to my home and meet him? There would be murder! Oh! why was I not brave enough to tell Warren all, and trust to his great love for forgiveness?"

Even her husband, justly incensed as he was, must have pitied her changed appearance, her haggard face, the dark rims round her pretty eyes, that look faded and dim, and full of the sadness of unshed tears.

Acting upon impulse, prompted by fear, she had fled from home, and sought a quiet asylum where she had been wont to come with her father.

She did not contemplate an eternal separation from her husband, but only quiet seclusion for a few days, until she had time to collect her scattered thoughts, and resolve upon a future plan of action, whereby to regain her husband's love and esteem, if that were possible.

"I would throw myself at his mother's feet and sue for her forgiveness and intercession with Warren, but she is implacable—as hard as flint, as unforgiving as hate! Why was I so rash as to take what one day would have been mine by right, instead of defying Oscar? I have purchased his silence at too great a cost, and ruined not only my own life just as it was beginning to open, but also Warren's, one of the best and noblest of men!"

One bright summer morning, after a great battle with her pride, Esme is on her way to Croylands, bent upon propitiating Warren's mother by restoring the jewels, less a bracelet given to Oscar to buy his silence.

"Surely she will be merciful when she thinks of my youth and hears of my sore temptation," she thinks, sadly, as the train goes on its way past homesteads, meadows, smiling orchards, and busy towns and cities, hives of human industry. "And if Warren is there he might plead for me. I know he would, for he could not look upon me at his feet unmoved—he loved me once so very dearly—especially as I am restoring what his mother prizes so much."

"A lady to see me, Jane?" asks Margaret, in surprise. "Who is she?"

"The lady won't give any name, but only said 'Master Warren,'" replies the pretty, smart little maid. "You would understand by that, she said."

"Show the lady in," falters the dame, a pallor o'erspreading her wrinkled face, for she is at no loss to conjecture who her visitor is.

"Margaret, dear old friend, I have come to you first in my sore trouble," sobs Esme, as she raises her thick veil and looks beseechingly at the kind face upturned to her. "Won't you kiss me?"

"Yes, my lady, because you are Master Warren's wife, and I was the first to bid you welcome to his home."

"And now I want to see Lady Croyland," says Esme, when greetings are over, and both are more composed.

"No, do not go near her," Margaret says, in deep alarm. "She turned upon her son, my boy Warren. His picture is turned to the wall, and she says she has no son now. If she is so hard to him, what would she not be to you? Take an old woman's advice and don't rouse her, lest she should do something dreadful."

"It is to propitiate her I have come," replies Esme. "I have no fear of her anger, Margaret; but for Warren's sake I will submit to even insults as far as I can, trusting to her good sense not to drive me at bay."

"Wait for a few days; take time. Ask your husband's advice before facing her, who is something little short in her mad rage of being a tigress. You can have no conception of what she can be when roused. Again let me implore you not to see her until you obtain your husband's permission."

"I cannot speak to him until I have seen her. Where is she to be found?"

"In her boudoir," says Margaret, sadly,

perceiving that she is bent upon carrying out her purpose, in spite of all warnings.

"Who's there?" asks a stern, hard voice, in answer to Esme's knock, which she repeats.

The door is opened, and Esme literally forces her way past Lady Croyland, not from audacity, but because she fears a refusal at her hands.

"You here, shameless woman!" cries Warren's mother, eyeing Esme furiously.

"Yes; but perhaps you will spare your cruel reproaches until you have heard me out."

"Who sent you here?"

"No one—not even your son."

"I have no son now, madam!" she says, sternly. "He married a thief! Ay, you may look as if you could strike me, but the truth cannot be gainsaid. You know you took the Croyland diamonds, as you also stole his heart, only to break it, and cast it aside like a worthless piece of china!"

"Suppose the jewels are restored, all but a bracelet—would you forgive my husband and not bear malice against me?"

"No! All or nothing must be restored. There can be no trafficking with an heirloom that has been in my family!"

"Our family, you mean?" interrupts Esme, prompted by one of her rash impulses to beard Lady Croyland thus.

"No, not yours! The law will drive you forth like the alien you are! A woman who could steal has been guilty of even worse against the canons of morality! I wonder my ancestors do not rise from their graves and reproach you for the shame and disgrace you have brought upon their memories!"

"What proof have you, Lady Croyland, supposing malice, such as you have shown towards me from the very first, should prompt you to give me in charge for robbery?"

"I bandy no words with you, madam; leave the house this moment, lest I be tempted to put the law in force against you. The honour of a Croyland is of more value in my eyes than a million diamonds. Go free, but remember my curse rests upon you—will follow you until, someday, you will crawl here to die and make restitution?"

"Never. I am met with reproaches and insults—I, your son's wife, who could not steal what is her own by every human right. You have had your day, and I simply wanted to shine in my husband's eyes through an admiring society, but you drove me away from your door—I, who had done nothing wrong, and by cruel insinuations tried to rob me of my husband's respect and protection. Your curse will revert upon your own head, madam, and someday you will supplicate my pardon, when, perhaps, I will withhold it from you as you have to-day from me. The diamonds are not lost, and never shall be. As Lady Croyland, your son's wife, whether you disown me or not, I have every right to their custody."

And with a sweeping, mocking courtesy she leaves the enraged woman, who, instead of humiliating her, had been herself ground under Esme's heel.

"Graceless creature!" exclaims her ladyship, as the door closes behind her mutinous daughter-in-law. "Oh! the shame of being spoken to, reviled by her, I, the daughter of a long list of earls, she a needy adventuress, a thief—perhaps worse!"

"Who was that lady I met on the stairs, dear Lady Croylands?" asks a handsome girl, dressed in pale blue satin and cashmere, a large hat adorned with an ostrich feather shading her clear-out features, who has just returned from a ramble in the woods, and is laden with wild ferns and flowers.

"A woman dangerous to know, my dear Maude."

"Oh! how very dreadful!" returns Lady Maude Douglas, "that one so beautiful should be so wicked."

"Beautiful, yes, as a serpent, and quite as fatal to those who befriend her; let us not even speak of her, my child."

Like an inspiration it flashes through the girl's mind that she has seen Warren's wife

who for some reason, not made known to her, has incurred Lady Croyland's enmity.

"I wonder why Lady Croyland is so incensed against her?" thinks the maiden, contemplatively, as she empties out her treasures and groups them in artistic shades. "Heigho! I should not like to offend dear Lady Croyland. Who knows, perhaps, it's as well she cannot now become my mother-in-law? I don't think I should like her so much in that position as I do now."

"Before you take off your things, Maude, what say you to a drive? I am jaded and worried, and the air might soothe my shattered nerves."

"I should like it, above all things, for it is very warm walking, so different to our Scottish hills and dales, where one is always sure of a breeze."

Near the railway station a stile divided it from green lanes, along which Lady Croyland and her visitor drove, chatting about the doings of society, after which Lady Maude hungers, eager to taste the sweets of the only earthly paradise there is for the rich.

"Who is that poor woman?" asked the girl, as Esme's sobs reached her.

"I don't know, dear; she appears in great distress. Suppose we get out and see what it is she is fretting about?" replied the elder lady.

But before her kind intention can be carried out there meets her gaze the well-remembered face of Warren's wife, who was giving vent at that lonely spot to the sorrow that is gnawing at her heart like a canker worm.

In a moment Lady Croyland is her old implacable self again, and whips her ponies to get away quickly from that face and those reproachful eyes that will haunt her for many a day.

"Twice have I seen her. I wonder if this portends that we shall meet a third time?" thinks Lady Maude, who is well up in Scottish folk-lore, and believes in omens and portents.

"She can drive and scatter the dust over me while I walk, or starve, for aught she cares," says Esme, drying her tears, ashamed that her enemy should have seen her in her moment of weakness.

Another blow awaited her, when, full of contrition, she sought her husband's home to beg for pardon and reconciliation.

The house was shut up, every blind drawn, and a notice that it was to let in the window.

"What can it all mean? Only a week ago it was full of life, and now nothing but silence. Can he have left England? Oh, no! he would never do that without making some effort to trace me."

But facts are inexorable, and wait not upon sentiment, as she found when the caretaker told her that the furniture had been sold, and his lordship gone abroad—where she could not say.

While Esme stands dazed, as if under some baleful spell, the woman adds,—

"If you have come from her ladyship you can tell her that all her things are locked up in her rooms, and will be sent to any address she likes to name."

These words arouse Esme from her stupor, when she realises her loss fully, and with a murmured,—

"Gone for ever! My Warren! my darling!" she falls senseless to the floor.

(To be continued.)

THE CZAR.—There was a company of men engaged in a game of whist in a friend's parlour one night. It grew late, and fears were expressed by the party that they were trespassing upon the kindness of the mistress of the house, who, by the way, was not present. "Not at all, gentlemen; not at all. Play as long as you please. I am Czar here," said the master of the mansion. "Yes, gentlemen, play as long as you please," said a silvery voice—and all rose immediately as the mistress of the house stood before them—"but as it is nearly one o'clock the Czar is going to bed." He went.

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

CHAPTER XIII.

DISMISSED.

ELFIE fled to her own room, still under the influence of that wild terror which had seized her when Clarence Maltby caught her in his arms.

In this frame of mind she was mad enough to have flung herself from the topmost window to the ground, or to have courted death in any shape, however terrible, so that she might escape from the grasp of the man who inspired her with such agonising fear.

Now, the moment she entered her room she closed the door, locked it frantically, and then, panting and out of breath, she flung herself by the side of the bed, trembling in every limb like a hunted fawn.

"What is the matter?" asked a voice that was familiar to her. "Why have you locked me in?"

It was Charlie Birch who spoke. She had been waiting here, wondering how much longer Mrs. Maltby would keep Elfie, and as she felt too restless and too impatient to read, the time had passed but slowly with her.

The loud shriek that had reached her ears, followed immediately afterwards by Elfie's sudden appearance and agitated behaviour, told Charlie pretty plainly what had happened; and she now tried to soothe the excited girl, begging her to be calm, and not to rouse the whole household.

But this was just what Elfie had done. Few of the guests had retired to rest, though they had gone to their rooms; and now there was the sound of the opening of doors, and a general murmur of voices; but these soon subsided, and Charlie and Elfie thought that the alarm was over, when the handle of the bedroom door was turned sharply, as though by one having authority, and the voice of the mistress of the house said peremptorily,—

"Open the door—admit me at once!"

"I will unlock it," said Charlie, in a low tone, and she rose and did so.

Mrs. Maltby swept into the room, wearing a long, cardinal-coloured dressing gown, and with her long black hair streaming down her back.

Her eyes first rested upon Elfie, who was sitting upon a couch looking at her.

But the poor girl's face was very pale with agitation, and her dark eyes appeared larger than usual; while the quivering of her sweet lips showed that she was still greatly unnerved.

Without taking any notice of Charlie, whom she pretended not to see, though it was she who closed the door behind her, the mistress of the house advanced to the middle of the room; and extending her hands—palms outward, in a manner peculiar to herself, and as though she were demanding something—she asked in what she intended to be a crushing tone,—

"And pray, Miss Heath, what do you mean by rousing my household, disturbing my guests, and creating a disgraceful scandal under my roof?"

Elfie was so amazed at this attack that she sat speechless, her eyes widely opened, and her lips slightly parted, gazing in dismay at the strange, angry woman before her.

From such an attack as this she could not defend herself.

Homeless and friendless, her maidenly modesty outraged; insulted, and reviled because she had dared to utter a protest against her cowardly assailant, the poor girl felt as though her very heart would break, and as though death were her only refuge from the scorn thus poured upon her.

For a few seconds there was silence. Charlie Birch wished Elfie to defend herself; but seeing that she could not do so, and judging rightly that if left alone only further insult and contumely would be showered upon her, she coolly walked to the side of the

ill-used girl; and, having herself no fear of Mrs. Maltby, she looked calmly at that lady, and said, quietly,—

"I presume, madam, that Miss Heath objected to be made the sport of a libertine, even under your roof."

"Thank you, Miss Birch. I am demanding an explanation from my secretary—not from you!" retorted Mrs. Maltby, frigidly.

If only this scene had taken place in Charlie's room instead of Elfie's Mrs. Maltby would have ordered the latter to retire to her own chamber; but she could not very easily order her guest to leave the room, and that guest showed no intention of doing so.

Elfie had gained courage by Charlie's championship; but she might not have tried to defend herself if she had not found her friend snubbed; the feeling, however, that she could not allow another to suffer in her stead nerved her to say, simply and timidly,—

"As I left your room, Mrs. Maltby, and just as I got to the foot of this staircase, your son caught me in his arms and tried to kiss me. I was so frightened that I shrieked as loud as I could for help, and he let me go. But—but I can't bear it any longer, he makes my life a burden to me!"

"A burden to you!" repeated Mrs. Maltby, with infinite scorn; "a burden to you, when you have used every art of which you are mistress to entangle him into a shameful marriage—he makes life a burden to you!"

"I entangle him! I want to marry him!" repeated Elfie, in utter amazement.

"Yes, you!" hissed out the infuriated mother.

First an expression of intense relief, then a smile came over our heroine's face, clearing away the clouds of perplexity and trouble that had hung over it, and in a quiet but earnest tone she said,—

"You may believe me or not, madam, but there is no form of death so painful that I would not rather suffer than become your son's wife."

"Bah!" cried the elder woman, furiously. "You say that to throw dust in my eyes."

"I say it because it is true," was the passionless answer.

"And I quite sympathise in the sentiment," here interposed Charlie incisively. "I cannot understand that a greater misfortune could befall any woman than to become Clarence Maltby's wife."

"Do you forget that I am his mother?" demanded that lady indignantly.

"No, I don't forget it, but you have my sincere sympathy under the circumstances," replied Charlie.

And, as she looked at Mrs. Maltby not a muscle of her face moved; she might have meant every word that she said, literally; and it was not unlikely that she did so.

Her hostess fixed her big rolling eyes on the heiress for a second or two, then she breathed a deep sigh, and addressing her secretary she said coldly and formally,—

"You will leave my service to-morrow morning, Miss Heath, and you will not come to my table again. Your breakfast will be brought here when you ring for it, and if you come to my study at ten o'clock I will pay whatever is due to you."

Then she turned on her heel, as though she had stood on a pivot, and swept out of the room, leaving the door wide open, and taking no notice whatever of the daring girl who had expressed pity for her.

Elfie sat helpless, with clasped hands and bowed head.

She would be only too glad to get away from Maltby Grange, but whither should she go?

Isolt Greatrex was abroad, and though she now longed, beyond the power of words to express, to return to the Hermitage, she at the same time felt that such a step on her part would be impossible.

If her feelings now had only been what they were when Edith Grey surprised her with Lionel's letter in her hand, then she might

have gone back, if only to have asked if she had done wisely or not in coming away; and whatever the answer had been, she might have accepted such help, as advice with regard to her future, and a kind word to friends would have been to her.

But this could not be now.

She had stood where the brook and river met; she had sailed upon the wider and the deeper stream; and love, with all its wonderful possibilities, its bright sunshine and its dark shadows, had taken possession of her soul.

It was not the love of a child for a father, or of a sister for a brother.

Even she, with all her ignorance of the world, with all her innocent simplicity, felt that her love was not a feeling to be openly avowed, but one to be hidden deep in her heart, the very secret of its existence to be guarded, if need be, with her life.

So here she sat, crushed and silent, wishing, with the rash impatience of youth, that her life, with all its miseries, was at an end.

She was startled from this condition of depression by hearing Charlie Birch laughing heartily, as though something very comic had taken place.

"What a fine piece of acting!" remarked Charlie, in answer to Elfie's look of reproach, "it's a pity she had such an unappreciative audience. Judging from the scene we have just witnessed, you would imagine that all that anger and indignation was real, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I should," replied Elfie, with a glance of surprise; "it seemed very real to me."

"Of course, there was the talent displayed in it. If you had thought that the same scene with variations had been rehearsed half-a-dozen times at least for the benefit of half-a-dozen successive unfortunate secretaries, you would not take the matter so very much to heart, my dear, neither would you trouble yourself to remember Mrs. Maltby's sharp words."

"No, I suppose not," replied Elfie, slightly brightening as she spoke. "I remember now that all of the secretaries who have been here that I have heard mentioned were said to be anxious for Mr. Maltby to marry them."

"Of course, dear; that is a very euphemistic way of putting it. The same will be said of you, no doubt."

"Oh, I hope not. The very thought is intolerable!" exclaimed our poor heroine, quickly.

"My dear, what does it matter?" returned Charlie, carelessly, though with much contempt in her voice. "No one will believe it, any more than they believe nine-tenths of the rest of the rubbish that Mrs. Maltby talks. But enough of this. We have the future to think of, rather than the past or the present."

"Yes," assented Elfie.

But here she paused, because the future to her was like an unopened book, the very clasp of which she knew not how to undo.

"You leave here to-morrow," remarked Charlie; "so do I; we shall go at the same time."

"But why are you leaving?" asked Elfie.

"I hope I have not shortened your stay?"

"Oh, dear, no; I came here to-night to tell you that I was going away, and I was waiting to do so when this little episode occurred. It is impossible for me to remain longer as the guest of a lady who literally turns out of her house a gentleman whom I introduced to her."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Elfie, not understanding her.

"Of Mr. Kingswood. Didn't you hear of it?"

"No. I knew that he was going away," replied Elfie, blushing, and feeling vexed at doing so. "He met me in the hall as I was leaving the study, and he said good-bye; but I did not understand why he went away so hurriedly, though I believe he did say something about assassination."

"Oh, you met him, did you?" And Charlie's voice changed in spite of herself.

But she conquered her transient jealousy, and bravely resolved that, even if it were well founded, it should not make her be one whit the less a true friend to Elsie.

"Yes," was the answer; "I saw him for a second or two, but Mr. Maltby joined us, and I left the two gentlemen, and went to the drawing-room."

"Ah, then, you don't know what happened?"

Then Charlie described the conversation concerning Major Golf, and added that she herself spoke to Mrs. Maltby about Mr. Kingswood.

"She said she didn't mean to drive him away," continued Charlie; "but she did it all the same, and I shall leave this house early in the morning. I would have gone to-night, only it is so late."

Elsie made no answer.

Mrs. Penfold's offer of taking her as a companion flashed through her mind, and though she shrank with unaccountable repugnance from accepting it, she scarcely knew what else to do.

"If you have no other engagement you had better come with me," remarked Charlie, kindly. "I have a very nice house of my own in Devonshire, where I shall go when I leave here, and I shall be very glad, indeed, of your society. I have a female dragon, who lives with me for the sake of appearances, but she is awfully dull, and her conversation consists of little more than the county history from early morn to dewy eve. You will live a very quiet life with me, but I don't think you will be uncomfortable, and we shall get a few dances between this and Christmas."

"Oh, you are most kind!" responded Elsie, while tears of gratitude sprang to her eyes. "If you will let me stay a little while with you I shall be very thankful; but I will not be a burden to you long, and I cannot afford to spend an idle life."

"Burden! Nonsense, my dear! You won't be any burden; you will be a great comfort to me. My she-dragon gets a hundred a year, and you will get fifty, if you will accept it, for amusing me; that will buy you gloves and boots. And now I really must go to bed. Is it settled? Will you go home with me to-morrow?"

"I shall be only too thankful to do so," was the grateful reply.

"Then good-night."

So saying, Charlie kissed her, and went off to her own room, leaving poor Elsie a prey to so many conflicting emotions that she was only too glad to put her head on her pillow, and leave her packing, with all other things of the morrow, to take care of themselves.

Strangely enough, too, after all the agitation and excitement of the day, she slept peacefully enough, and when she awoke in the morning her first thought was that of wonder as to what good fortune had befallen her.

She was not long in realizing that it was the delight of feeling that she was going away from Maltby Grange that had such a wonderful effect upon her spirits.

Before she had finished packing up all her belongings, Charlie came into her room, and greeting her with a bright smile, said—

"I am going down to breakfast, and I probably shall not see you till we are ready to go, but I shall wait for you, and we will drive to Paddington and get luncheon there before we start for Devonshire. I have written out a telegram to tell them to send the carriage to the station to meet us."

"Thank you, that will be delightful!" responded Elsie.

Then she observed, in a more nervous tone—

"I am rather dreading my meeting with Mrs. Maltby in the study at ten o'clock."

"You need not, you have done no wrong!" asserted Charlie, promptly; "and I mean to

let the people here know it before I go away. I mean to announce at the breakfast-table that you are going with me. By-the-way, have you rang for breakfast as you were desired to do?"

"No, thank you; I don't want any," was the timid reply.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Birch, promptly.

Then she walked to the bell-rope, pulled it sharply, and when a servant appeared, she told the woman to bring Miss Heath's breakfast as soon as possible, and to let it be a good one, as they were going on a long journey together.

"And mind you eat your breakfast," continued the heiress when the servant had gone.

"The idea of your thinking of fasting; of course you would have wept when you got to the study from sheer nervous exhaustion, and Mrs. Maltby and her cub would have triumphed over you. There goes the gong!"

Then Miss Birch went down to breakfast, but Elsie's morning experiences had only just begun.

Breakfast came and she tried to eat, though not with much success, and she was rising from table when her door opened without ceremony, and Mrs. Penfold walked in as though it had been one of the ordinary sitting-rooms.

Elsie was surprised and perhaps a little amazed, but she remembered her dependent position, and now she was going away she experienced a feeling of kindness to the old lady who had behaved so oddly to her, so she said "Good-morning," offered her a chair, and then waited to hear why he had come.

"Is it true that you are going away, Miss Heath?" asked Mrs. Penfold, fixing the girl with her sharp, steady eyes.

"Yes," was the quiet reply; "I am going away this morning."

"If you would like to stay I will make things straight for you," was the next astonishing remark. "Clarence shall go away for a week or two, and his mother shall send for you to write her letters as usual."

Elsie was surprised, though she knew enough of this strange household to believe that it was quite possible for her visitor to do all this.

The chance of freedom, however, was too alluring to be relinquished, and she replied, quietly—

"Thank you, I am very glad to go. It would be impossible for me to stay here after what Mrs. Maltby said to me last night."

"Very well then, you must come with me. I'll take you to Trebartha, and I'll show you something that will astonish you. By-the-way, what is that white mark on the side of your neck?"

And she held the girl firmly while she examined a white scar just behind the left ear.

"I don't know. I suppose I must always have had it," replied Elsie, surprised, and a little alarmed at the old lady's strong grasp.

"Ah! if that had been the eighth of an inch deeper you wouldn't have troubled Clarence Maltby or me either," said Mrs. Penfold, absently, as she turned to leave the room.

"I cannot go to Trebartha with you," said Elsie, firmly.

But Mrs. Penfold seemed not to hear her, and though the girl repeated the assertion, her words appeared to fall upon deaf ears.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLARENCE GOES TOO FAR.

"THERE is the amount due to you, Miss Heath, including payment for a month in advance instead of a month's notice."

And as Mrs. Maltby said this she pointed to a small pile of gold which stood upon the table.

"Thank you," said Elsie, humbly, as she took the coins in her hand.

She would have liked to decline the month's payment instead of notice to quit. But she dared not.

For the moment it seemed as though the

clouds that hung over her chequered life had broken, leaving a glimpse of a brighter day beyond; but she knew quite well that, however fond she might be of Miss Birch, or Charlie of herself, that she was only exchanging the caprice of one mistress for that of another.

Charlie's caprices would take a much more amiable form than Mrs. Maltby's; she did not doubt, but the relationship would still be the same, and it might happen at any hour that she would again be thrown upon her own resources.

So she pocketed the money that, after all, was only her rightful due, and was moving towards the door, intending merely to say "Good-morning," when Mrs. Maltby, who had expected some protest or some plea for kindness, now said, coldly—

"You need not trouble any lady to write to me for a recommendation, Miss Heath, because, under the circumstances, I should not feel justified in giving one."

But even this did not tempt the ill-used girl to retort.

She simply bowed her head and went out of the room, leaving Mrs. Maltby mistress of the situation, but not feeling by any means victorious.

For a few seconds the strange, dark-eyed woman paced the long, narrow room thoughtfully, her head bent forward as though she were studying the pattern of the carpet, though in point-of-fact she did not see a line of it.

She was more sorry to part with Elsie than she cared to admit.

There had been something inexpressibly winning about the beautiful, golden-haired girl who had come into this house like a gleam of sunshine.

In her way she had been very useful. She had never murmured, no matter how much work had been given her to get through; she had been cheerful and obliging, and though she was very young, her manners were faultless, and there was such an air of good breeding about her, that when guests had been here she had been a great acquisition to the hostess in entertaining them.

And now she was going!—driven away as so many others who had held the same post had been driven away before her; and Mrs. Maltby, as she looked at the unfinished manuscript of her Irish adventures, and glanced at the pile of unopened letters which last come by the morning post, felt it in her heart to be furiously angry with her son for having deprived her of so useful a secretary.

"It's too bad of Clarence," she exclaimed, as she began to realise what she had lost; "much too bad of him; and I won't stand it any longer! He shall go away, he may adopt a profession, or he may marry. I don't care what he does. I can't, and I won't put up with this kind of thing! My life is made a burden to me by his conduct; and, now I think of it, I don't consider that I have behaved quite fairly to Miss Heath in putting all the blame upon her. I almost wish—"

What she almost wished was not expressed, for at that moment the study door opened, and Mrs. Birch, attired as for a journey, walked in, buttoning up her long gloves as she came. Mrs. Maltby had not appeared at the breakfast-table, so Charlie had come to her.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Maltby," said the young lady, coming slowly forward, completing the buttoning process as she spoke. "I'm going home; nice day for a journey, isn't it?"

"Going home!" repeated the lady of the house, contracting her brows as she spoke. "I thought you were going to stay a fortnight?"

"Oh, yes, so did I," returned Charlie, with a yawn. "But I likewise thought I was going to be jolly, and I haven't been. Besides, you might get tired of me and turn me out of the house as you have done Mr. Kingswood and Miss Heath, and I'm afraid I shouldn't like it, so good-bye."

"This is not like you, Charlie—it isn't fair," protested Mrs. Maltby, passionately.

"you know that I did not turn Mr. Kingswood out of the house—I never meant to turn Mr. Kingswood out of the house. I never meant him to go; I sent Clarence after him to apologise for me."

"Which he did not do," retorted Charlie, curtly.

"And as for Miss Heath," continued the hostess, not heeding the interruption, "she is not a guest, but a servant—a person whom I employ; and she—"

"Don't say anything against Miss Heath, if you please," here interrupted Charlie, sternly. "I know all the circumstances, and I consider her conduct to be above reproach, in proof of which I am taking her as my friend to live with me."

"Have you considered that in so doing you condemn my son?" asked Mrs. Maltby, steadily.

Charlie shrugged her shoulders; then, looking at the infuriated mother with an inquiring glance, she asked—

"And what if I do?"

"I hoped that you and Clarence understood each other, and that you would judge him kindly," was the significant answer.

Charlie laughed heartily, though the colour deepened on her cheek as she said—

"My dear Mrs. Maltby, you never made a greater mistake in your life, and I think I gave you to understand as much last night. Good-bye, or we shall lose our train."

Then they went through the formality of a hurried leave-taking, and Charlie returned to the Hall, where Elsie was waiting for her.

Our poor little heroine stood by the luggage, conscious that the servants were looking at her, and feeling that they were regarding her with pity, if not with scorn.

She would have been surprised, therefore, if she had heard the verdict in the servants' hall upon her conduct, which was—

"Good thing for her that she's going. She's too good for this place."

But Charlie came at last. The luggage was got on to the fly, and the two girls drove away, both of them feeling more light-hearted than they had done for many days.

Once or twice, while leaving that house which she never wished to see again, Elsie thought of Mrs. Penfold, and wondered what she would say when she found she was gone.

But the reflection likewise came that she had twice told the old lady that she could not go with her, and it was not her fault if she would not take "no" for an answer.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Maltby had sank down upon her usual seat between the fire and that thickly-littered round table, which Elsie had never been permitted to clear of the dozens of useless things strewn upon it.

She was very much depressed, and not a little bewildered at the unpleasant novelty of the situation, and she now turned and twisted and dropped and picked up again the half-hoop ring of large diamonds, which it was her custom to play with rather than to wear.

"It's very provoking," she mused, gloomily—"very provoking, indeed; and I don't quite know what to do. I think I must send for Colonel St. Vincent and ask his advice—only I know pretty well what his advice will be, and I don't feel quite equal to making up my mind either way."

The prospect of a second husband was not particularly alluring to Mrs. Maltby, but she had the feeling common to many women, that she must have a member of the stronger sex belonging to her.

While her son was docile and passably amiable she needed no one else, just as, while her husband lived and seemed rather like a useless upper-servant than the master of the house, she was quite satisfied.

Now, however, if she quarrelled with Clarence, she must have some man to take his place at table, and to be the nominal master of the house; but she knew well enough that some men are much more difficult to manage than others, and she was not quite so sure about

the tractability of Colonel St. Vincent as she would have liked to be.

She was still undecided when the door again opened, and Mrs. Penfold appeared.

Something in the face of her kinswoman slightly startled Mrs. Maltby, but she repressed her inclination to ask questions, and only remarked, casually,—

"You are going for a drive, I see?"

"Yes, I'm going for a long drive—a very long drive!" was the facetious answer. "I am going to drive to Trebartha, but I shall use steam horses part of the way."

"Going to Trebartha!" echoed Mrs. Maltby, in genuine surprise. "What is the meaning of this? I thought you didn't mean to return there till the winter?"

"I thought I meant to return when I felt disposed to do so," was the snappish answer. "I'm my own mistress, I suppose, and I'm going now, and you can tell your precious son that if he ever hopes to be master of Trebartha he'll follow me soon—he on his best behaviour, and play the part of the repentant prodigal—it's the only character that will suit him."

"The prodigal!" repeated the anxious mother, angrily. "He has not been getting into debt again, has he? He has not been gambling again, surely? If he has I'll—"

"You'll marry Colonel St. Vincent," suggested Mrs. Penfold, filling the pause—"though you'll do that in any case, my dear. There's no fool like an old fool when there's a man or a woman in the way. But don't forget to give my message to your son."

"You have not answered my question," persisted Mrs. Maltby. "Has Clarence been getting into debt?"

"I don't know, neither do I care," was the answer. "If you give my message he'll know what I mean. Good-bye."

And without even offering her hand, Mrs. Penfold turned to depart.

Mrs. Maltby could not let her go like this, however, and she followed her into the hall, intending to take leave of her there, and to witness her departure.

But here there was some unaccountable delay. Perran, Mrs. Penfold's servant, came downstairs, and approaching her mistress said something to her in a low tone. Then there was a question addressed to one of the servants, followed after his answer by Mrs. Penfold exclaiming,—

"Gone! Miss Heath gone!"

"Is it Miss Heath for whom you are waiting?" asked Mrs. Maltby, with a provoking smile.

"Of course it is. Where is she? I am going to take her with me to Trebartha," was the half-defiant reply.

"What a pity she didn't know your intention," remarked the mistress of the house, with quiet satire; "for, of course, she would have been delighted, but now she has gone with Miss Birch to Devonshire."

"Gone to Devonshire!" ejaculated the old lady in blank dismay; "are you sure of what you tell me?"

"Certainly not. I am only sure that Miss Birch told me she was going to take her home with her; my interest in that young person is at an end."

"Don't be too sure of that," remarked Mrs. Penfold, in a tone which sounded like a threat; "you have not heard the last of that young lady, not the last by a great deal, my dear. Give me the address of Miss Birch."

"I can't give it to you. It is somewhere near Tiverton; that is all I can tell you," and Mrs. Maltby yawned as she spoke.

But she did not try to mollify her objectionable kinswoman, and she was thankful beyond expression to think she was really going away.

A word at this juncture would detain her, she felt sure, but she took good care not to say that word.

She was getting impatient of the petty worries, that like a number of small thorns pierced her skin, and annoyed her without

doing any serious harm, and Mrs. Penfold's presence in the house was the most irritating of all.

So she stood, playing with her diamond ring, with that far-away look in her eyes which might mean so much or so little, while Mrs. Penfold stood irresolute, reluctant to go, now her object in going had vanished, yet not quite knowing at the moment how to say she would stay.

Mrs. Maltby, however, decided that her guest had gone too far to retreat, and turning to the housekeeper who was standing by, she said—

"I shall go to Hastings myself to-morrow, Kirby, so have everything arranged for me; I want a change."

This observation ended Mrs. Penfold's indecision, and after a very brief leave-taking she stepped into the hired carriage awaiting her, mentally resolving that this should be her very last visit to Maltby Grange.

Perhaps the mistress of the house registered a similar vow.

Certain it is, that as she afterwards sat brooding in her study, she determined to make a complete and entire change in her life.

Whether the change would be an improvement had yet to be ascertained, but the pleasure of making a change is always great, provided it is done from choice, and not from necessity.

A few hours later, that same day, Clarence Maltby came back to his mother's house, looking not unlike a whipped cur; and he learnt from a servant, whom he questioned, that all the visitors had gone away, and that Colonel St. Vincent was with his mother.

"Has he been here long?" he asked, with a scowl.

"About two hours, sir," was the reply. He muttered something under his breath, then observed, awkwardly,—

"Did you say that Mrs. Penfold was gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who else?"

"Everyone, sir."

This was not the answer he wanted, but he would not ask if Miss Heath had departed, though he felt pretty sure that she had been included in the "everyone."

In no amiable mood he sought his mother. He had been a little ashamed of himself in the early morning, and had gone off to town before breakfast; but, on reflection, he decided that it was of no use running away—he must brave it out sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

Having come to this practical conclusion he had returned, and now he gloomily resolved that he would put an end to Colonel St. Vincent "sneaking" about the house.

He forgot for the moment that he was not master here.

From his cradle he had been spoilt, and his mother, except on rare occasions, had yielded to his whims, as it is the habit of mothers to yield to an only son.

So now he stuck his hands into his pockets in an aggressive manner, and sauntered into the room where Colonel St. Vincent and his mother were seated on a couch side by side.

The couple were startled, and Mrs. Maltby moved an inch or two from her companion's side, but the Colonel held his ground.

He had won the game, and could now afford to quietly snub the young man whom he had always despised, so he merely nodded his head and said, carelessly,—

"Ah! how d'ye do?"

"I need not ask how you are," retorted the young man, insolently; "you're looking deucedly comfortable there."

"I am very comfortable, thank you," was the unflinching response.

Then, turning to the lady, the Colonel said, in a slightly subdued tone,—

"I may as well tell him, my dear; he is your son, and has a right to hear of the happiness you have conferred upon me."

The lady bowed and drooped her eyelids. She still played with that diamond ring; and



["STOP!" MRS. MALTBY COMMANDED; "LEAVE MY HOUSE, AND DARE NOT TO COME BACK AGAIN TILL YOU HAVE APOLOGISED."]

her manner was so exasperating to her son that he could scarcely overcome the impulse to snatch the jewel from her hand and fling it through the window.

He did not yield to this temptation, however, but his rage against the Colonel seemed to gather in intensity from this self-restraint, and he positively glared at the soldier as the latter rose from his seat on the couch and, taking a step or two towards him, said,—

"My dear boy, your mother has rewarded my devotion by promising to become my wife; and I hope that you will henceforth consider me your truest friend."

Clarence expected something of this kind from the moment that Colonel St. Vincent began to speak, but now rage choked his own utterance.

For a second or two he could not articulate an intelligible word.

But when he did regain the use of his tongue, he poured forth such a torrent of low, vulgar, profane abuse, that his mother stared at him in astonishment, while the sneer and expression of disgust upon the Colonel's face was far more eloquent than words.

At length he began to threaten, and even to show signs of fight; for, though he was a coward at heart, he was a young man, whereas Colonel St. Vincent was old, and in any personal encounter the probability was that youth and physical strength must gain an advantage.

Although he was both abused and threatened, Colonel St. Vincent did not lose his temper, neither did he show any sign of fear.

Had he been alone with this young brute he would soon have made short work with him, for he knew that the ruffian was an arrant coward.

But he wished to put him entirely in the wrong, to give him plenty of rope wherewith to hang himself, and to make even the fond, foolish mother take the side of the man who could thus suffer unmerited insult for her sake.

If Clarence Maltby had possessed one atom of common sense, if he had entertained the least consideration for his mother, or respect for himself, he would not have aimed a blow at his future stepfather, a blow which the latter managed to evade, and which, with wonderful self-control, he did not attempt to return.

The climax, however, had been reached, and Mrs. Maltby sprang to her feet, her small, slight figure dilated, her big black eyes blazing, her face aglow with imperious scorn.

"Stop!" she commanded, in a tone which Clarence had never yet in all his life once dared to disobey. "Stop! I am mistress here. Leave my house, and dare not to come back again until you have apologised for this outrage to Colonel St. Vincent and to me."

She looked splendidly handsome as she stood there, like a queen compelling obedience from her most unruly subject, and the Colonel was proud of her.

As for her son, he looked at her sullenly and silently for a few seconds, then, knowing from much experience that resistance was useless, he turned to go.

But when he reached the door he looked back, with an evil expression on his face, and said,—

"You two are not married yet, and, if I can help it, you never will be."

Foolish young man!

But for that vague threat his mother would have been prudent, and would have had the most exacting settlements signed before she went to church; but with this hanging over them, Colonel St. Vincent had little difficulty in persuading her to marry him forthwith, and three days afterwards the wedded pair were on their way to the Continent to spend their honeymoon.

As for Clarence, he had driven Elsie from his mother's house by his conduct towards her; now he was an outcast from it himself, uncertain whither to go, or what to do.

"I'll go down to old Pen at Trebartha," he

thought, gloomily, when he heard of his mother's marriage; "there's nothing else for me to do. She'll help me if she can."

He came to this resolution as he was walking away from the hotel, whither he had betaken himself on being turned out of the Grange, and he was now rather startled by a lady standing in his path and asking,—

"Pardon me, but am I speaking to Mr. Maltby, of Maltby Grange?"

"My name is Maltby," he replied, in a tone of annoyance, at being accosted by a stranger, particularly as the questioner was not young, and her beauty was a thing of the past.

"I thought so. There was a girl whom your mother engaged as a secretary; a girl with dark eyes and light hair. Can you tell me what has become of her?"

"You mean Miss Heath, I suppose?" he said, curtly.

"Oh! is that the name she goes under?" asked Edith Grey, with a sneer.

"Goes under? What! Isn't it her real name?" asked the young man, with suddenly awakened interest.

"She has no name," was the disdainful reply.

"I must know more about this. Come this way," he said, eagerly, and turned into the park, whither Edith Grey followed him.

(To be continued.)

A FRIEND should be one in whose understanding and virtue we can equally confide, and whose opinion we can value at once for its justice and sincerity.

Be careful of the books you read as of the company you keep; for your habits and character will be as much influenced by the former as by the latter.

When a man begins to love money for money's sake, and not for what it will procure, it is no longer a desire for independence, but the provision of avarice.



[HE HAD TAKEN THE LITTLE HAND AND GENTLY PRESSED IT AS HE LOOKED DOWN UPON HER.]

NOVELETTE.]

GUSSY'S PROMISE.

CHAPTER I.

WAR!

"Let the boy go? Of course," said Mr. Buncombe, in answer to his wife, who, with an open letter in her hand, had just read to him the contents of the same.

It was from their son, a lad of twenty, who had written to tell his mother that he had volunteered for service in the Soudan, that he had obtained a pass for two days just to say good-bye, and would be with them that night, to kiss her, might be for the last time; and, mother-like, she sat with the open letter in her lap, and with the tears in her eyes had implored her husband to buy him out—do anything but let him go to that dreadful place.

Mr. Buncombe was a non com. He had served his twenty-one years, and retired with a pension, after having seen foreign service, although the sword, which hung over the chimney-glass in the comfortable rooms he now occupied in — street, was bright and untarnished as on the first day he wore it, no blood stains ever having dimmed its lustre, or covered it with imaginary glory. But notwithstanding, Mr. Buncombe looked upon this relic of his warlike days with as much pride as though he had carried it up the heights of Alma, or had bathed it in the blood of the Russians on the plains of Inkerman—a pride which was shared equally by the whole family, which consisted of Mrs. Buncombe and an orphan niece, whom the old pensioner had vowed to look upon as his own daughter since that day on which a large blue letter, with "On Her Majesty's Service," in big letters printed on the top, had informed him of his only brother's death in his country's cause.

Poor little Alice! Her mother had been

dead years, so long ago that she could not even recall her features; and had it not been for the kindness of her aunt and uncle she would have been left to the mercy of a cold and pitiless world. She and Kyrle, until the latter had enlisted, had scarcely ever been separated since the days they shared each other's troubles and toffee together, and grew up as brother and sister beneath the same roof.

Mr. Buncombe could not possibly have thought more of himself than Alice thought of him, who, as a child, had listened to his stories, of the wonderful feats he had performed, the marvellous escapes he had had, until she looked upon him as a hero; and would consider, as she gazed on that emblem of his martial career, what a lucky thing it was for any enemy that he had not had the opportunity of using it in action.

She had listened, the tears starting to her violet eyes, as her aunt read the contents of the letter she had just received. Kyrle going to the war—going away, and perhaps they should never see each other again! Oh! why were there such horrid things as battles, and killing of men who had never done each other any harm! And when her uncle spoke she could not answer for the great lump that rose in her throat; but two rings at the street door, announcing that she was wanted below, caused her to rise from her seat, and hurrying down two flights of stairs she opened the former, to be clasped in the arms of Kyrle himself.

He was a tall, handsome lad, looking four years older than he really was owing to a light, silky moustache which hung over his upper lip.

"Here we are, Alice," he said, as he clasped the girl in his arms. "Is mother upstairs?"

"Yes," was the reply; "but we did not expect you so soon, we have not long had your letter. Oh! Kyrle, what could make you volunteer. Mother is broken-hearted, and so—"

"Are you, Alice. Is that it?" he said, as he kissed the tears from her eyes. "But come

up, and we will talk it all over, and I don't think you will find it so very bad after all."

"So here you are, my boy," said Mr. Buncombe, as the door opened, and he and Alice entered the room. "Give us your hand. I always said you were a chip of the old block, didn't I, mother?"

But mother could only clasp her son to her heart, and endeavour to stifle the sobs which choked her utterance, only giving one look at the sword over the chimney-piece, as a sign that she acquiesced in what her husband said.

"Don't cry, mother," said Kyrle, as divesting himself of his coat and cap he took his place at the table, which Alice had covered with a snowy cloth, in preparation for supper.

"You think of nothing but my coming back, crowned with glory, maybe the Victoria Cross pinned on my breast after by the fair hands of Her Majesty herself."

"Victoria Cross, indeed!" sobbed Mrs. Buncombe. "Most likely a bullet put through your breast by the hand of a hateful Arab. Why couldn't you have waited till you were sent out, and not gone volunteering to be shot at for the sake of wearing an ugly brown thing not worth sixpence."

"It isn't the medal you know, mother, but the honour, which if it were only a brass button would make it valuable."

"Bravo, my boy!" said his father, as Kyrle, after having so delivered himself, forgot military glory, war, and carnage, as his attention was for the time being given to the substantial supper with which the board was liberally supplied.

Alice had fully recovered her spirits, her happiness in the present eclipsing thoughts of any future trouble which might be in store for her. Kyrle was with them now, and drying her eyes she was determined not to cast any gloom over the few days he had to spend with them; and it was only in the solitude of her chamber that the tears would roll down her cheeks as the time of parting, with each fleeting hour, drew nearer and nearer.

"And you will never forget me, Alice?" he said, as, for the last time, he accompanied her home from the photographers where she was daily engaged in the reception-room. "This time to-morrow you won't have me to walk home with you."

"Oh! I don't talk of it, Kyrle," she replied. "You don't know how I have striven to hide from you the misery I am enduring. You cannot love me as I love you, or you would never have gone for a soldier."

"It was no wish of mine to be one, Alice, you know; but how could I go against what my father set his mind on? As for myself, I would rather have swung a crossbow than have had to leave you. I can no longer, you'll admit, and would rather face a cannon than your tears. But, dear, I get so tired of home service, and feel as though I couldn't rest whilst so many of our brave fellows are fighting out there. Who is that?"

And he turned suddenly, as a gentleman passing at that moment raised his hat to his companion.

He was superior in his style, and Kyrle could see, as he caught a glimpse of his tall figure and the classical cut of his aristocratic features, that he was not one in their own station of life.

"Oh! that is Captain DeLorne," said Alice, as a perceptible blush overclouded her face. "He is one of our customers, you know; but I did not think he would have recognised me in the street."

"Thank!" was the only reply Kyrle made, as almost silently they continued their way until they were once again at his father's door.

The latter was not at home as they entered, and Mrs. Buncombe being engaged in some culinary occupation downstairs, the room was quite deserted, save for the cat, which was curled up asleep on the rug, over which a cheerful fire threw a ruddy glow.

Alice threw off her hat and jacket when approaching Kyrle, who, after having silently divested himself of his overcoat, had sat by the fire, devoting all his attention to pipes.

"What is the matter, dear?" she asked. "You changed so suddenly; I have not offended you, Kyrle, have I?"

"No, Alice," he replied, "you haven't offended me."

"Then what is it?" she asked. "Leave off stroking the cat, do, and tell me what has made you cross."

He looked down on the pretty face upturned to his own, as she had thrown herself on the hearthrug at his feet, and pushing back the nut-brown curls as they nestled on her white forehead.

"How long have you known Captain DeLorne?" he asked.

She could not turn her head, as he held it imprisoned in his hands, and the faint blush soon passed from it, as laughing—

"You silly boy," she said, "are you cross because the Captain noticed me in the street? I know nothing of him further than he comes always every day to the studio, generally bringing some friend with him; but don't hold my head like that, Kyrle. I feel as if I was in a vice."

"And he has never spoken to you, Alice?" he asked, as he released her.

"Spoken to me! Of course he has often in the way of business. Why, that's what I am there for, to speak to customers and answer their questions. What do you mean?"

"I mean, has he ever told you, Alice, how pretty you are? How—but why do you blush? I know he has," and he almost threw the girl from him.

"Well, that is nothing very dreadful, dear," she said, sanely. "It only shows the man has taste. But think no more, darling," she continued, in an altered tone, "of Captain DeLorne, or any other captain. You know you are all in all to me, and I do so want to be happy with you the little time we have together."

"Do you mean what you say, Alice?—that you care for no one but me?" he asked.

"Of course I do," she replied, as she allowed him to draw her once more close to his bosom, whilst he told her how dear she was to his heart, till the old pensioner's voice without recalled them to a sense of their situation.

CHAPTER II.

GOOD-BYE.

EARLY the next day Kyrle had to leave London, and it was very late the previous evening before they had retired to rest. Mrs. Buncombe being the last to stay with her darling boy. Moments, which at times had hung so heavily on her hands, now seemed to fly with double speed, until she could scarcely believe, when the time came to part, that it was really true that she must say good-bye.

"Cheer up, mother," he said, as sobbing, she clung to him to the last moment. "I shall soon be back, and shall have such a lot to tell you on my return that you will laugh at your fears now. Look at Alice, how brave she is!"

Brave! Alas, poor Alice! She would have given worlds to have been able to sub out the grief which, as that of a dumb animal, was alone seen in her beautiful eyes—eyes which burnt in their sockets, and to which the moisture, which would have given them relief, was denied, as she saw her very life going from her, thus adding to the agony experienced by her lover, as he gazed on the misery depicted on her countenance.

At last, having freed himself from his mother's embrace, and having given his father a last hearty shake of the hand, he moved to where she stood petrified beneath her great sorrow.

"My darling, won't you say good-bye?" he said.

His voice appeared to recall her to herself, as for a moment she became conscious of her situation; when, with a cry, in which all the pent-up agony of her soul was concentrated—

"Kyrle! Kyrle!" she cried, and fell in a swoon into his arms.

He had but a moment to gaze on her pale face, and then, resigning her to the care of his weeping mother, he pressed a tender kiss on her unconscious brow, and breathing an inward prayer that they might meet again. "Take care of her, mother!" he said, and was gone.

The fresh morning air played on his features, and seemed to infuse him with fresh life, and in part drove from his mind the painful scene of that last good-bye; but the anguished cry of "Kyrle! Kyrle!" still hovered in his ear, until he was glad to meet with companions in his journey, who by their conversation helped to drive it from him.

There was one young fellow—he could not have been more than four-and-twenty—who had been called up. He was in the reserve, and had to leave wife and child to join the ranks. It was a sore parting, he had told Kyrle—he had been up all night; but it was over now, and he was ready to go to Gordon's relief; after saying which, overcome with fatigue and the stimulants he had evidently taken to drown his sorrow, he fell fast asleep.

"I reckon, stranger, Gordon's deliverer is well-nigh fixed," said a Yankee, who sat opposite to Kyrle, as he gave the former a dig in the ribs.

"Here, wake up," he said, "and have a drop, for I guess as how yer'll be wantin' somethin' to keep yer up afore yer face the black devils."

"Who are you talking to?" said the reserve man, as he again composed himself to sleep.

"Why, I'm a-talkin' to yer, I guess," replied the Yankee, as with another nudge he again aroused him. "Here yer are, just give a sniff, and I'll reckon yer won't be sayin' no to a pull," and he held the brandy flask right under his nose.

"Go to botheration with your guests and

reckonings," exclaimed the other, "or I'll have such a reckoning with you as I guess you won't care for."

"Well, be blamed if he ain't a hot 'un," said the American, as he handed the flask to Kyrle; "but I'll guess he'll live to want what he says no to, and that afore he's smashed the Mahdi, or fixed himself in Khartoum," at which sally he set up such a guffaw that the sleeping warrior opened his eyes, and Kyrle could not suppress a smile.

At the next station the Yankees alighted, after having administered such a slap on the shoulder of the unfortunate reserve man as to make him almost jump from his seat.

"Good-bye, stranger," he said, "and good luck to yer."

"Good-bye to you," returned the other, as he again composed himself to sleep, which he could now do without interruption; whilst Kyrle was not sorry to be left alone with his thoughts, as that last agonising cry of "Kyrle! Kyrle!" still rang in his ears.

His companion mattered in his sleep, and the name of Mary was distinctly audible, as evidently in his dreams he was again with the beloved ones at home.

"Poor fellow!" thought the other, "dreaming of wife and child."

Although mid-November the morning broke out bright and clear, the sun shining as though spring had suddenly appeared, which in some measure helped to dispel the sad feelings which had taken possession of his breast; and Kyrle, in the lightness and elasticity of youth, felt his spirits rise beneath the atmospheric influence, so that when he again entered his barracks there was the same joyous ring in his voice, to which his comrades were so accustomed, and which made him such a favourite amongst them.

But Alice, after that sad parting, though she soon recovered from the swoon into which she had fallen, could not recover her usual spirits. She walked to her business in Regent-street as though she was in a dream; she spoke to the different customers as they came and went in her accustomed tones; but her mind was away, away with Kyrle, and when she thought she was not observed the tears would gather in her violet eyes and dim the tints as she placed them on the photos.

"Are those photos finished?"

She turned from the table where she had been employed as the words fell on her ear, and encountered the gaze of Captain DeLorne.

The colour flew to her face, as hastily rising—

"I think so," she replied. "If you will take a seat I will see."

And she vanished into an adjoining apartment.

Norris DeLorne was a young officer of about twenty-five, with a good figure and handsome face, which, to judge from the number of photos he had had taken within the last few months, others were equally proud of as himself, as scarcely a day passed that he either did not come alone or with some friend to the studio.

"They will do," he said, as Alice showed him the cartes with which she had just re-entered the room. "I dare say you wonder, Miss Buncombe, whatever I can do with all this lot."

"I have never wondered about it at all," she replied. "It is no matter of mine, Captain DeLorne, how many photos you have taken."

"No, no, of course not," he answered. "But, excuse me, are you not well? You look so pale! I wish you would let me see you home to-night! I have something I want to say to you."

He had taken the little hand which held the pictures, and gently pressed it as he looked down on her, her face having become scarlet beneath his gaze.

"You can have nothing to say to me that you cannot say here," she replied, as she drew her hand from his grasp.

"Here! How can I tell you here why it is that I come so often—why I cannot pass this place without coming to see you? You can't think that I want a hundred representations of my own physiognomy. Until I saw you I didn't care a fig whether I had it transferred to paper or no; but I have never met any one whose face haunts me as yours has done. I mean."

"Hush!" said Alice, "you must not talk to me like this, Captain DeLorne! I am merely a subordinate; our positions in life are so different that you only insult me by speaking to me thus. If you are a gentleman you will never repeat what you have said to-day!"

"Far was it from my thoughts to insult you," he replied. "Forgive me if I have done so; but your sad face to-day made me to know how much I really loved you—an honourable love which, believe or not as you will, I would offer you—which would defy birth, position—anything but a husband's right to protect you. I am not a saint, you know; and when first I used to come here it was only to see a pretty face and charming figure, until I found those violet eyes of yours haunting me wherever I went, and I had played with the fire until I had become burnt. I knew, Alice, that I loved you."

She looked for a moment into his face, bent down so close to hers as if she would there read the truth of his words; and then moving away to the table where her unfinished work remained she stooped over the same to hide her rising tears as thoughts of Kyrie arose to her mind.

"And what is my answer now, Alice?" he asked, as he followed to where she was seated. "Will you be my wife?"

"No, Captain DeLorne!" she answered, "a thousand times no! I thank you for the compliment you have paid me—as you will one day thank me for the answer I have given. I should never marry out of my own position in life!"

"And is that your only reason?" he asked.

But before she could reply two ladies entered the room.

"What, you here, Norris?" said the elder one, as she noticed the young officer's presence, and also that he turned very red as his eyes encountered hers.

"Yes, mother. What do you think of those?"

And he placed the photos he had just received from Alice in the hands of Mrs. DeLorne.

"They are perfectly charming, are they not, Augusta?" answered that lady, as she handed them to her niece. "What are they the photos?" she continued, addressing Alice, into whose face she actually stared, as if she thought there she might account for the sudden colour which had suffused her son's when she entered.

"A very pretty young woman!" she solicited. "And this is where Norris spends his afternoons! No wonder his friends wonder what becomes of him. Eighteen shillings, did you say?" she said, in answer to Alice's reply to her question as to the price of the photos.

"Eighteen shillings, Augusta!" and she turned to where her niece was conversing with Norris. "I do not think you can do better than have a dozen;" and, Augusta agreeing, the latter shook her curly golden head at her cousin, as much as to say—

"Mind what you are about," and followed her aunt from the room.

Augusta was a blonde and a beauty, with laughing blue eyes, a saucy little mouth, and a nose slightly retroussé, but so slightly as to add piquancy to, rather than to retract from, the charm of her whole face. She was a petite, a tiny model of womanhood—as Norris would affirm, a pocket-edition of feminine loveliness.

She was devotedly fond of her cousin, but never looked upon him as a lover. She didn't care for cousins marrying, and whenever her

aunt would hint at such a probability, which she very often did, she would adroitly turn the subject to some other more pleasant, or would jokingly declare she loved Norris a great deal too much ever to marry him, as she felt sure she should make any man miserable who became her husband.

"Am I to take that as your final answer, Alice?" asked DeLorne, as the door having closed on the ladies, they were again alone.

"Yes," she replied; "and if we are to be friends never refer to it again."

"Then you will let me be your friend, Alice?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, if you will allow me to call you such," she replied.

"Then you will tell me what troubles you that you look so sad to-day?" and he passed his hand over her brown curls as she sat by the table she usually occupied.

"I have just parted from a very dear friend, Captain DeLorne, whom I may never see again—so whom last night I said, maybe, my last good-bye."

"Was it your sweetheart, Alice?" he asked, hastily. "And is that why you refused me?"

"He is my cousin," she replied, evasively. "We were brought up as children together, and we were never parted until he joined the army."

"And it was him I saw you with yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "He went away early this morning, having volunteered for service in the Sudan. Oh, Captain DeLorne! it is dreadful! From my infancy it is war that has deprived me of those nearest and dearest to me; and I shall dread to look through the list of killed and wounded now, fearing his name should be amongst them."

"You must not think like that," he answered, as he saw the tears gather in her beautiful eyes. "You must be brave."

"Be brave?" she replied, as for a moment she raised her head from her work. "My father's dead body left in an Abyssinian grave, and all I ever remember of my mother, a piercing scream, as they took me from her arms, an orphan."

"But you have kind friends left to you, Alice? You are not alone, are you?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "From that day my uncle took me and brought me up as his own; but he would hear of nothing but that his son must be a soldier, as he had been before him; and so Kyrie went. But the ladies are coming downstairs; I must not talk to you any more."

"But you will let me be your friend, Alice, won't you?" and he took her hands unobtrusively in his, his lips for one moment touching hers, and he then left the room by one door as Mrs. DeLorne and Augusta entered by another.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAST EVENING.

NORRIS DE LORNE had up to this time been on leave, his regiment, which he was ordered immediately to rejoin, being stationed at Gibraltar, the same being ordered to the front.

He had not told Alice on that last day he had seen her at the studio of his intended departure, as further than a flirtation and a walk, and maybe a visit to a theatre, he had had no intention of committing himself in the manner he had done, it being but the action of a sudden impulse, which on mature consideration he was very grateful that she had met in the light she had. He would be her friend, had he ever the chance to do her a service, but he would never again endeavour to trifle with her feelings, which he for the first time valued at their true standard.

His cousin chaffed him numerously about his numerous visits to the studio, and the magnet which attracted him thither; but then Augusta couldn't avoid chaffing; it was her nature, and he felt a relief, when he mentally reviewed his last visit there, to think how matters had ended, and when alone he

took the first steps towards forgetting his folly by consigning a packet of photos to the flames before others should be aware that he possessed them.

Not that Augusta was much in the humour for teasing now, since each day was about to lengthen the distance between her and Norris; she had become very quiet and subdued, a frame of mind so unusual for her.

It was the night previous to his departure. Norris had been from home chief of the day, bidding good-bye to club-friends, and making a few purchases as souvenirs to those nearest to him, before leaving them, perhaps for ever.

Augusta did not care to go out; he might come home at any moment, and she should grudge the loss of a minute that she might have had in his society to be spent elsewhere; and to make herself more miserable than she already felt she read again and again the most harrowing accounts of the struggle in the desert, drawing in her imagination a picture of nothing but fever, pestilence, and death, creating human faces in the fire-beds which she sat, until she fancied she could discern that of Norris in the throes of death.

She had always been the favourite niece of Mrs. DeLorne, and during their childhood, Norris, being an only child, almost his inseparable companion, making the residence of her aunt in Lowndes-square more her home than that of her own parents, until she cared for the former much more than she did for her own brothers.

To him she went with all her troubles. There was no one she could confide in as she could in Norris, whom she considered had a specific for all her troubles, as in the days when he mended the spring which opened and shut the eyes of a favourite doll, which, unknown to herself, he had previously surreptitiously destroyed; and now, when he was on leave, and she had accepted her aunt's invitation to spend the three months he was expected to be at home with her, to be so suddenly recalled in the midst of their happiness, had filled her soul with vexation; and as she sat nursing her grief and disappointment, she felt if he would only leave the service she would put aside all scruples as to cohabitation, and marry him straight off.

"Building castles in the air, little one?" asked Norris, who had entered the room so quietly that she did not perceive him until his hand was placed on her shoulder.

"No," she said, starting. "I was weeping over their ashes. Oh! this horrid war!" she said. "I was thinking if you would only leave the army I would—"

"Would what?" asked Norris, as he bent over her, "make a coward of me?"

"Oh, no, no, I could never do that, but I really was thinking I would marry you," she said, in the old bantering tone.

"You are very kind," he replied, laughing, "but that is a happiness I must ask you to defer for the present."

"What have you got there?" she asked, as he drew a small packet from his breast-pocket, "more photos?" and she gave a mischievous laugh.

"Yes, dear, more photos," he answered. "It is for you; keep it, Gussy dear, for my sake."

She took it from him; it was, indeed a likeness of himself, enclosed in a golden locket, set with diamonds and pearls.

"Oh! Norris, how good you are?" she said, as, rising from her seat, she threw her arms round his neck. "I will never part with it, never, never! I will always wear it, so that I can look at your dear face until you come back."

"And if I never come back, Gussy?" he asked.

"Oh! don't talk like that, Norris!" she cried, as the tears welled to her pretty blue eyes. "I should die if I thought I should never see you again."

"Will you do something for my sake when I am away, Gussy?" he asked.

"Yes, anything, Norris; you know I would," she sobbed.

"Well, then, you know the girl at the studio whom you used to chaff me about," he said. "I want you to make friends with her. I don't mean exactly to be friends as you mean," he continued, as he noticed the look of astonishment on the face of his cousin. "But should she ever require a friend, if she had any great trouble, would you act as one to her for my sake, Gussy?"

"I don't understand," replied the girl, as Norris blurted it out in an incoherent, mixed-up sort of way.

"Well, dear," he said, now proceeding at railroad speed, in which he told his cousin of what had transpired between him and Alice—how she had rejected an offer which, in the impulse of the moment, he had made her; how her beauty had attracted, and had drawn from him a confession of love, which she, instead of jumping at, as most girls in her position would have done, had declined, and had raised herself in his esteem by declaring that not only would the difference in station have made her give the same answer, but she could never wed a man she did not love; but—

"What?" asked Augusta.

"I promised if she ever required a friend I would be one to her. I am going away, Gussy; will you act as such in my stead? She is an orphan, living with her uncle, an old pensioner, and one she is very fond of, is called away as I am, and she may require comfort."

"I understand," Gussy answered, as she passed her handkerchief over her tearful face. "And do you really care for this girl, Norris?" she asked, dubiously.

"I do not love her, dear, if you mean that; but I have learnt to respect her and, she having told me her history, feel pity for her. But there goes the first gong; I must dress for dinner, and here comes the mater."

"I did not know you had returned, Norris," said the latter, a perceptible mist gathering over her eyes as she encountered the gaze of her son. "You need not mind about dressing the last evening. I could not bear any one but ourselves, so have asked no one to join us at dinner."

And a very melancholy affair the latter turned out, as the untasted dishes came and went, a forced conversation merely carried on to avoid the scrutinizing looks of the servants.

The dessert was placed on at last, when a thundering rat-tat broke the silence which apparently hung over the entire house, and a few minutes later an elderly gentleman appeared on the scene.

"Oh, papa, I am so glad!" cried Augusta.

"Yes, here I am," said the newcomer; "how are you, my boy?" shaking hands with Norris. "Came as soon as I received your telegram, Isabel," and he took the seat Norris placed for him beside his mother, after having shaken hands with the latter.

"I thought you would like to see our boy before he went," said Mrs. DeLorne, in a broken voice; "it was so sudden, you know."

"Quite right, quite right," was the reply. "They all send love and God-speed from home," he said, addressing Norris. "What time do you start?"

"By the first train to-morrow morning, uncle," said Norris.

Mrs. DeLorne had been a widow for many years, and having no one but an only brother to look to for counsel or help in any difficulty, it was no unusual thing for Mr. Manvers to be summoned from his pretty home near Windsor whenever his sister required his assistance or advice.

But it was totally against the latter that Norris had been allowed to adopt the army as a profession.

"You know, Isabel," he had said to his sister, "that you can't bear the boy out of your sight, and you will worry yourself into your grave when once he leaves England for foreign service."

But the boy, who had ever had his own way

from his babyhood, had it in this; and, in spite of his uncle's wishes, and his mother's tears, became a soldier.

Nor was Mr. Manvers wholly disinterested in what he considered the maddest thing to which his sister could have given her consent. His was a poor family, and it was only by marriage that the latter had become at her husband's death the possessor of a fortune and the residence in Lowndes-square, which, with the exception of an annuity, would on the death of her son revert to his family, the next-of-kin being the son of that husband's only sister.

Malcolm Rayson was three years the senior of Norris, and was a clerk in holy orders, struggling on a small stipend to keep up the dignity of the church, and the nap on his clerical coat, at times far from entering into the text of the tenth commandment whilst allowing his mind to contemplate how different his position would have been had his uncle died childless; and it was with a little bound of hope that his heart beat beneath his clerical vest as he read of his cousin's regiment being ordered to the front.

The late Mr. DeLorne had made his money in a large sheep farm in Australia, and his sister been left in straitened circumstances, and being several years his junior, had always built her hopes on ultimately becoming the inheritor of that wealth; but Norris DeLorne, senior, had different views. He returned to England and shortly after married Isabel Manvers, thereby incurring the severe displeasure of Mrs. Rayson, who, however, would have overlooked that folly had it not been followed by the birth of a son, thus dispelling her last dream that her darling Malcolm would become his uncle's heir.

Since then only a show of friendship had existed between the two families; and although Mrs. Rayson and her son still visited the DeLornes, they did so more from a reconnoitring motive—to see how matters were in the enemy's camp—than from any love for its inmates, though at times Malcolm, who was not a bad fellow, could not understand why his mother should chafe against what she considered the injustice of Norris ever having been born.

But from his childhood she had so instilled the same into his mind that he very naturally considered the cause of their impecuniosity, and so forth, was wholly due to the same reason, thus preventing the close friendship which otherwise might have sprung up between the cousins.

Mrs. Rayson had insisted on his entering the church, merely because Norris had chosen the army, and it was not long since when Malcolm was appointed to the curacy of Carfield, a small village not far from Windsor, where the Manvers lived a life which would have been intolerably irksome to the young man, who had anything but a love for the pulpit, had he not in his parochial duties been thrown in the society of the family at "The Laurels," as Mr. Manvers's place was called. Of course it was Augusta's brothers whom he presumably visited, although, on occasions when Augusta was from home, the visits were considerably curtailed.

"I saw Malcolm Rayson yesterday," said Mr. Manvers, appealing to his nephew, "and he desires me to convey to you his best wishes—"

"That he might be killed, I suppose?" said Mrs. DeLorne, who well knew the feeling existing between herself and sister-in-law.

"No, no, Isabel," rejoined the old gentleman. "I don't believe the boy is so bad, whatever the mother may be."

"I am sure he is not," chimed in Augusta, the colour rising to her face, "or he wouldn't be so liked in the parish."

"Oh! he is liked then?" said Norris, noting the sudden flush which had suffused his cousin's face. "Well, for my part, I think him a very good fellow, and wishes as to my future will never kill nor save me; but if mother

will, I think we may as well adjourn to the drawing-room, where Gussy will give us some music, won't you?" he asked, addressing the latter, "as I want to make the most of my time."

And often in the weeks that followed, did Norris picture to himself, when on the sandy dessert he lay parched with heat and thirst, that cosy drawing-room at home, over which the gas-light, within its shades of roseate hue, threw a subdued and gentle light, whilst Gussy's clear voice, of which every note was music, he would again hear in his fitful slumbers, and fancy he felt the soft pressure of his mother's hand, as he was tossed with the delirium of fever.

CHAPTER IV.

NEW FRIENDS.

"You'll not forget your promise, little one?" said Norris, as the following morning he for the last time pressed Gussy to his bosom, after having kissed his mother's tearful face, and then jumped into the cab which was awaiting him, accompanied by Mr. Manvers, who would insist on journeying with him to Portsmouth.

Augusta feeling she could not rest in the house, where everything so reminded her of Norris, had gained her aunt's permission to go out, that lady herself admitting she was but poor company for a young girl; and so donning her hat and jacket she determined to proceed as far as Regent-street.

Alice was busily engaged tinting some cartes as the girl entered, and the colour flew to her face as she recognised in her visitor the friend of Captain DeLorne.

"You are not very busy, are you?" she said, as she took the chair Alice offered her, "I want so much to say a few words to you."

"No, we are very quiet to-day," Alice replied, as, had it not been for the kindness of her tone, she would almost have dreaded what it was this young lady had to tell her.

"You and Captain DeLorne were great friends, were you not?" she asked.

Alice raised her violet eyes from her work, her face becoming scarlet to the very roots of her nut-brown hair.

"Captain DeLorne was a customer here," she replied, evasively, "that was all."

And Augusta thought she must have begun in a very awkward way, as the other appeared to resent what she intended as kindness as an impertinence.

"I hope I have not offended you?" she said, drawing her chair to the table; "I only want to be your friend; he has told me all."

"All what?" asked Alice, her eyes flashing with indignation, as she supposed this girl was about, perhaps, to lecture her on what she doubtless considered her forwardness.

"Don't look like that," said Augusta, "you misjudge my motive, indeed you do, but Captain DeLorne and I are as brother and sister. We never have any secrets; he told me when you refused to be his wife—that he had promised to be your friend. Well, he has left London, now, left this morning to rejoin his regiment, and he asked me to bring you his last good-bye, and if you ever require a friend to be to you what he would have been."

"You are very kind," she replied. "I have no one now but aunt and uncle."

"And were you very fond of him?" asked Augusta, thinking it was in allusion to the absence of her cousin that Alice applied the last observation.

"Him! Captain DeLorne, do you mean? No," Alice replied; "I never had any thought of him, nor did I ever accept the flowers he would bring me with the idea of leading him to suppose I did. I thought him a pleasant gentleman, nothing more."

"Then why do you say you have no one but your aunt and uncle?"

"Because," she replied, as the tears started to her eyes, "the one I love dearer than my own life has gone from me. You say you will be my friend; I should be so glad if you

will let me sometimes speak to you of him, it will relieve my mind to have some one to confide in."

And then in their mutual sorrow the two girls seemed drawn together, and Alice could speak of Kyrle—ever Kyrle—as in the leisure time Augusta would read to her news from the latest telegrams; and selfish as we ever are, she would become quite cheerful, as although engagements had taken place in which his regiment was, his name never appeared in the list of killed and wounded.

Mrs. Buncombe had received one letter from her son, enclosing one to Alice, which had been brought by a home-bound vessel on his way out, and then all was silence and uncertainty, and week passed week with only the news gathered from the daily papers—the fall of Khartoum, the death of Gordon.

"The Guards left this morning," said Mr. Buncombe to his wife, as he emptied the ashes from his pipe, previous to refilling it. "The place was crowded. I never saw such a sight, and the Prince himself was there to bid them good-bye."

"You might have taken me with you to have seen them, uncle," said Alice, who had just returned from business, and was divesting herself of her outdoor apparel. "Any fresh news to-night?" and she took up the paper her uncle had been reading, as she sat by his side.

"Have taken you!" laughed the latter; "why you wouldn't have turned out at seven or before I know; but there it is, you can read all about it, there's nothing else this evening."

"Well, well; Heaven help them all! that's all I can say," sighed Mrs. Buncombe. "I wish I'd never had anything to do with soldiers, that I do!"

"No you don't, Maria," said her better half. "You were fond enough of them at one time; leastways, you wouldn't leave me alone, and you said then you regularly doated on red-coats."

"I said nothing of the kind, Mr. Buncombe," replied his wife.

"Oh, yes you did, you know," said the former, as rising he advanced to where she sat, and kissed her careworn face. "Why there wasn't a dearer little woman in the whole corps, no, nor a handsomer; brave and fearless as a lion, and gentle as a dove; but, goodness! what on earth is that?" and Mr. Buncombe turned with a scared face, as a smash was heard behind him.

The sword which was placed over the chimney-glass had fallen, in its descent, breaking a vase, amongst the scattered fragments of which it lay at Mr. Buncombe's feet.

"Well, I'll be blest!" exclaimed that gentleman. "How on earth did that happen?" whilst his wife's face had become deadly pale.

"Why, the nail has come out, uncle," said Alice. "What a pity!" and she began to collect the portions of the broken vase. "Your fine speech frightened it, I'm thinking," she continued, laughing. "But aunt, whatever makes you so white? Never mind, I daresay I can mend it."

"A bad omen, my child, a bad omen," replied the latter. "Oh! Heaven, help Kyrle!"

"Nonsense, mother," said her husband. "Why, look, the nail is eaten up with rust, and wasn't half knocked in. Kyrle is all right, you make no mistake about that. Here, Alice, my girl, give us a hammer, and we'll soon rectify this little job."

But Mrs. Buncombe could not overcome her superstitious fear. All that night she never closed her eyes but to dream of her darling boy; now she saw him beset by Arabs, now with his arms thrown upwards fall backwards shot through the breast, until with the morning light she arose wearied and unrefreshed.

Alice went backwards and forwards as usual to Regent-street, but she sadly missed the society of Miss Manvers, who had

returned to The Laurels for a time, her father saying he could not spare her altogether.

But she had made Alice promise that she would write and let her know how she was going on, and that in whatever might occur ever to look upon her as a friend.

"I shall soon be back," she said, as they parted; "but, oh, I forgot to tell you aunt had a letter from Norris this morning. He writes so cheerfully. They have had dreadful privations, he says, but are much better off now;" and then she read to her a scrap of the one which was enclosed to herself, in which he told her to keep the promise she had made. "And I have written," she continued, "and told him all about your cousin, and should he come across him that he was to do what he could for him, so cheer up, there's a good girl, and when I come back you must have some good news for me," and with a hug and a kiss she was gone.

CHAPTER V.

BAD NEWS.

Mrs. DeLORNE felt very lonely for the first few days after Gussy had left; the child was a sunbeam wherever she went, she declared, and she even hinted to her brother that she thought him very selfish to take her away just now; but Mrs. Manvers was in delicate health, and he said there was no one to see to the housekeeping, and they couldn't very well do without her.

The boys, too, grew jealous; she was their only sister, their friend, and yet she seemed to think more of Norris than she did of them; and they were not far wrong, for the former did not pull her hair, put nettles into her bed, and pay her many other similar attentions which they did, but as they had promised to reform if she would only return, she had done so.

She had been at home a week, and as if in honour of her visit the weather seemed to take a propitious change. The early spring sun shone bright and clear through the windows of the drawing-room in which she sat, which, although it enhanced the beauty of her yellow hair, brought out in equal power the defects of the shabby carpet, and made the furniture look dingy beneath its searching rays; and as a double knock resounded on the hall door Gussy took the precaution to draw down the blind, which, being red, dispelled the shabbiness by throwing a roseate hue over all, not a little adding to her own fairy beauty, as Mr. and Mrs. Rayson were announced.

No one but Augusta and Douglass knew how friendly she and the latter had become since he was first appointed to the curacy of the little village, as not even to Norris had she breathed a syllable of the interest she took in the young clergyman, save by the vivid blush which suffused her countenance when she espoused his cause in Lowndes-square.

But Douglass was deeply in love with this miniature of female loveliness, and when he blamed fate for having placed a life between him and a fortune, it was more for her sake than his own. There was nothing in the personal appearance of Norris in which he was wanting, as in the neighbourhood he was styled the handsome young parson, and had it not been that he might win her he would not covet what the other possessed.

Mrs. Manvers now entered the room, having been told of the visitors arrival, a pale, careworn woman, once a beauty, bearing the resemblance to her daughter that a plaster of Paris face would to that of the living. She and Mrs. Rayson were great friends, both grumblers in their way, the former ever harping on the subject of what she considered her dead brother's injustice, and the latter by her fretfulness only adding to the ill-health of which she was ever complaining.

"I am so glad you are come back," said Douglass to Gussy, who seeing that the ladies were fully engaged in a *tête-à-tête* had induced him to step with her through the open window

to the garden beneath, so warm and inviting was the February air.

"What, haven't things been going on all right then?" she asked, smiling; "for look here, Douglas, I don't mind seeing that your sick parishioners have beef-tea, and visiting your schools now and then, but I can never preside at those Dorcas meetings again. Seeing those old women cobbling pieces of calico together, whilst I read till I was hoarse, and they didn't understand a bit of what I had been reading, would simply drive me mad."

"Mother does all that," he replied, sadly; "but I thought you liked it."

"Then you thought wrong," she answered. "I only did it to please you."

And she drew a wool wrap around her.

"And you don't care to please me now, I understand?" he said, bitterly. "Money and Lowndes-square is desirably preferable to poverty and a country parson. I can't blame you, Gussy."

"Well, I can you," she replied, as she linked her arm in his. "You know I love Norris very, very dearly. We were children together, and he has been more a brother to me than Willie or Charlie have; but there is some one I love as dearly, only in a different way." And she looked up at the eager face of her companion, mischief lurking in the corners of her laughing blue eyes. "Can you guess who?"

"I think so," said Douglass. "Tell me, am I right?"

And he gently passed his arm round her waist, and drew her towards him.

"Perhaps so," she answered, saucily, as she pulled a tiny snowdrop to pieces, "although—"

"Although what?" he asked.

"I had made up my mind to marry Norris right off rather than he should have gone to the Soudan."

"Very kind of you, I am sure."

"That's just what he said," replied the girl; "but he wouldn't have me. What do you think of that?"

"That I am very glad," answered Douglass. "May I?"

"Well, I suppose so," she replied, "if I am worth having; but, mind, no presiding at Dorcas's meetings. But I am afraid, after all, I shall make but a very bad imitation of what a parson's wife should be, and so my mother will tell you."

"She can never tell me but that you are everything that is good, and no one can ever love you as I do. Gussy, my darling—"

"Hush!" she said, "come in," and she disengaged herself from his embrace. "I hear Charlie's voice, and he'll tease me for ever and for aye if he knows we have been so long in the garden together."

"Oh! there you are, Douglass!" said his mother, as they made their appearance; "we were wondering what had become of you."

"Miss Manvers has been showing me how nicely the seeds are springing up, mother," he said, "an event which, owing to the sparrows, she says, rarely occurs at the Laurels. But I am ready when you are."

And they were just about to leave as Charlie burst into the room.

"How do you do, Mrs. Rayson?" he said.

"How do you do?" to Douglass. "Just got this at Windsor," and he handed a paper to Augusta. "Another great battle, and British victory, with a list of killed and wounded. They say our loss has been heavy. But you are not going, are you?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Rayson. "We have paid quite a long visit, and I am afraid, have tired your mother out."

"You have cheered me instead," replied that lady, as she cordially shook hands with her visitors. "Do, Augusta, for goodness sake, draw up that blind; you have made the room quite dark."

And, indeed, it had become suddenly gloomy, but not so much so but that the latter could see the anxious change which came over the face of Mrs. Rayson as Charlie blurted out his news—news which she was not less anxious

to read when the door closed on Douglass and Douglass's mother.

"A most charming woman," said Mrs. Manvers, alluding to the latter, as she drew near the fire.

"A most hateful one, mamma, you mean," said Augusta, as she comfortably ensconced herself amongst some sofa cushions to have a good read.

"I am ashamed of you, Augusta," said her mother. "I am sure Mrs. Rayson is a perfect lady. I am delighted with her."

"I know what would delight her," said Augusta, as she turned to the latest from the Soudan, to see Norris's name amongst the killed. "Why, couldn't you see how her countenance changed when Charlie brought in the news?"

"I think you are very unjust, Gussy," said her mother, as she rose to leave the room.

"Well, I only hope I am!" said Gussy. And she let her golden head sink into the soft cushions, with the intention of fully enjoying herself.

And then she read of how our little force was attacked by the numerous foe, the broken square, when brave fellows fell right and left to rise no more, and then the gallant charge which drove the enemy from his position, and left the victory in the hands of the few.

But as her glance fell over the list which followed she started from the couch on which she lay as the name of Kyrle Buncombe, private, 1st Battalion Light Infantry, met her view, among the dead.

"Her lover!" she cried. "Oh, heavens! it will kill her! Poor girl, poor girl!" And then, as she thought of her promise to Norris, "it is my duty," she said, "to go to London at once, and give her such comfort as it is in my power to do."

So hastily writing a telegram, which she bade a servant to convey at once to Windsor, to tell her aunt she might expect her at Lowndes-square that night, she hurried upstairs to tell her mother that she must go to London at once.

Of course, Mr. and Mrs. Manvers wondered what wild freak Gussy had got in her head now; but the latter was quite a little queen in her way, and without much questioning was permitted to depart, Charlie acting as her escort to the station, when he saw her comfortably seated in the London train, and told her to come back soon.

CHAPTER VI.

FAR AWAY.

The last rays of the setting sun had long ceased to fall over the waters of the Nile as the British camp, not far distant, had endeavoured to seek rest in the short hours before the early dawn would again break in the eastern sky; and still the bullets from the enemy's rifles would whiz in and around, making that rest impossible, irritating the tempers of the men, who cowered beneath the circumstances which prevented their punishing their tormentors as they longed to do, although they had before silenced the gun which would have caused them most damage.

Within the seroba which they had formed the sick and wounded had been placed in comparative safety, beneath tents hastily erected, where amid the groans of the dying, and mingled curses and prayers of the others, were heard the distant reports of the rifles, as still the laden messengers of death fell within the camp.

"Ooh! ye murtherin' divils! but meself is the boy that'll make ye pay for this when the angel of a doctor has set me up agin!" said an Irishman who was just brought in with a splintered limb.

"How many fresh ones, doctor?" asked a young officer, who now appeared within the tent, as he advanced to where the former was engaged in the buildin' up, as Brin's son termed it, of his broken leg.

"Twenty, captain," was the reply; "but I have hopes of all, with the exception of two or three cases of earlier date. One is that of a young fellow here."

And he led the way to where a youth lay talking in the delirium of fever.

His fair face was perfectly smooth, save for a flaxen moustache which entirely hid his upper lip; whilst over his white forehead his hair, of the same hue, had become rough and entangled, forming tiny curls like those of a child.

"Yes, father," he was saying, as he tossed his head from side to side, "it's all right. You know it is only what a soldier must expect; but you'll take care of her, won't you? But don't tell mother," and he clutched hold of the doctor's hand. "It would kill her. Poor mother!"

Then, as he appeared to fall into a temporary sleep, the captain was about to pass on with his companion, when suddenly he jumped up, unheeding the gaping wound in his shoulder, from which the blood flowed out afresh.

"Who calls Kyrle? I am coming, my darling, I am coming! Don't stop me!" he cried, as by force the doctor held him down. "I will come, Alice, my love!"

"Who is this man?" asked the young officer, as the name of Kyrle fell from the lad's lips.

"Kyrle Buncombe," was the reply; "a brave youth; but I fear he has seen his last service. But he is not one of yours, Captain DeLorne."

"No; I know that," said Norris, as he still listened to the lad's ravings; "but save him, if it be possible; save him, doctor, for her sake. He is his mother's only son," and as the former moved away to others who required his services he wondered why Captain DeLorne should take such interest in this young fellow, by whom he still remained.

And for a moment something like a light of recognition beamed in the eyes of the wounded lad, as wonderfully he fixed his gaze on the officer, and then his muddled brain mixed him and Alice together.

"Have you brought her?" he asked. "Have you brought her to bid me good-bye? You know she didn't want me to be a soldier; but father would make me one. Tell him—tell her—no, not her!" he said, imploringly; "him, only him, that I died a soldier's death. I saw her last night, and she looked so sad, and there she is now!" he cried, wildly, "and she calls 'Kyrle! Kyrle!' Come, darling, and sit here close—quite close, and let me hold your hand, just like that, Alice. I am getting better now. Tell mother not to cry; it's only a scratch, love—nothing more," and again his eyelids drooped over the burning eyes beneath.

And Norris listened, as he felt rooted to the spot, until certain that the poor lad slept. He turned, scarcely able, brave soldier as he was, to suppress the emotion the scene had raised in his bosom.

"Poor lad!"

The voice came from behind him. It was a man in his own company, the one Kyrle had travelled with from London to Portsmouth.

"You here, Noles?" said Norris. "What is your wound? Are you much hurt?"

"Only an arm the less, sir," he replied. "But, poor young fellow, I'm afraid he's settled."

And Norris thought so too, as, bidding the man be of good cheer, he once more emerged from the tent.

The enemy were at last silent, and, save for the tramp of the sentries, a stillness had fallen over all, the men lying asleep, armed and ready for a surprise, the camels so disposed as to form a protection for the same.

Norris's servant was awaiting him to fulfil any orders his master might require before retiring to rest, but, the former having no need of his services, he was dismissed, whilst Norris, alone with his own thoughts, reviewed the strange fortune of war which had brought

him in close contact with the sweetheart of the little Alice he had so much admired.

Again he read Gussy's letter, in which she told him all about Kyrle, and Alice's love for him; and the dawn of day was spreading far over the wide desert before thoughts of home and dear ones, which prevented him from closing his weary eyes, became mixed in troubled dreams as a heavy sleep overcame him.

Kyrle was quieter when in the morning Norris again entered the hospital tent. He was sleeping peacefully, save for an occasional movement of his lips, uttering now and then a sentence in which the words were incoherent, the name of "Alice" alone telling where the lad's mind rested.

But Noles's case had taken a bad turn, and the doctor did not think he could live through the day.

"Captain," he said, as he saw Norris standing by the side of Kyrle, "I shall be gone first, after all. My poor girl! It will well-nigh break her heart, I know that; and my little chap will be wondering when they go back why father don't come."

"You will be all right, Noles," said Norris, "and yet live to see your wife and child again."

"No, sir," replied Noles, "it's all up with me; the lot has fallen on me, sir, that's all, the lot of death. Good-bye, sir, if I don't see you again, and let them tell her as gently as they can. Here's the Bible she would have me bring with me, and in it is the photo of herself and my boy. Take them, sir, and if ever you see old England again, will you let her have them?" and he took from his breast an old shabby book, which he gave into Norris's hands, whilst hot tears ran down his cheeks.

"Weak, sir." That's all he said, as he wiped them away with his one remaining arm. "Good-bye!" and Norris took the hand he held out to him, as he once more turned to leave.

"Poor fellow!" he said, as he went into the open air. The last sound that fell on his ear was Kyrle, who had now awaked, uttering the name of Alice.

The next day the order for marching was given; but ere then poor Noles was numbered among the dead; and as the convoy moved onward he was left to sleep with many a brave comrade in his desert grave.

And Norris, faithful to his trust, still retained the holy book consigned to his care by the dead man.

He had seen his features for the last time, as, once more he visited Kyrle, previous to their departure, then little thinking that his own noble heart, which beat thus in sympathy with his, would have soon ceased to beat for ever, leaving alone to sorrowing ones at home the glory which surrounded his memory, as the form they so fondly loved was laid to rest in the Soudan.

CHAPTER VII.

A MESSENGER OF DEATH.

It was too late when Augusta arrived in London at her aunt's residence to think of seeing Alice that night.

Mrs. DeLorne was anxiously awaiting her in the drawing-room.

What could it be, she wondered, that should bring Gussy to town in such haste?

And she still had the telegram in her hand as the latter entered the room.

"My dear child, is anything amiss?" she asked, when she at last succeeded in disengaging herself from her niece's embrace. "Your telegram quite frightened me."

"You should never be frightened at anything from me, auntie, by this time," replied the girl. "There is nothing the matter; at least," she added, "that concerns us. Why, aren't you glad to see me?"

"Of course I am, only too glad to have you here," said Mrs. DeLorne, as she rang the bell, to give her orders that supper should be immediately prepared in the dining-room.

"Have you heard from Norris, aunt?" asked Gussy, as, later on, having divested herself of her travelling-dress, she joined her aunt at the table.

"No, dear, I have not heard a word from him since the letter I had when you were here. But his name is mentioned here in a glowing account of the gallant way in which he defended a convoy of sick and wounded, which was attacked by the enemy," and raising, she brought from a table near the paper, showing, with maternal pride, the same to Gussy, where the full account was given.

"Dear, brave boy! Are you not proud to have such a son?" she asked, as, having come to an end of the paragraph, she returned it to her aunt.

"I am, Heaven bless him," was the reply; and long after they had again adjourned to the drawing-room did Mrs. DeLorne speak to Gussy of the absent one, in which she told the girl of the hope she had ever had that one day she and Norris would be her real children—that there was no one she should so like to welcome as a daughter as she whom she had known all her life; and no one, she felt assured, would make Norris so good a wife as she would. And Gussy listened, saying but little—a very unusual circumstance on her part; but knowing full well her aunt's aversion to the Raysons, she lacked the courage to tell her that she was the promised bride of Douglass, as even in him she knew she could see no virtue; and so, burying her secret in her bosom, she listened to the eulogiums heaped on Norris, in which she fully acquiesced, until, the hour being late, and saying she was tired, she thus excused herself for retiring to her room.

The next day she was out early, telling Mrs. DeLorne it was far too lovely to remain indoors, that she would have a walk in the Park, where the trees were laden with early buds, only awaiting a warm spring shower to make them burst forth in all their fresh beauty.

But it was not long that Gussy remained in the Park. She had sat down for a few moments in the least frequented part, where she could hear the distant hum of life as the roaring of a mighty sea, whilst she pondered in her mind how Alice was bearing the dreadful news which had come to her across the broad ocean, and how she could comfort her. And then supposing she was still in ignorance of the great trial awaiting her, how could she break the sad truth to her?

It was not an enviable position to be the bearer of evil tidings, or to gaze on the grief of a fellow-creature, but she had promised to be her friend; and when are friends more needed than in the time of affliction? So, as some children advanced to play shop on the seat she occupied, she vacated it in favour of their mercantile pursuits, and bent her steps to Regent-street.

No, Miss Buncombe had not been there that morning. She had sent a letter saying she was unable to leave home, her aunt being ill. Such was the answer received in reply to her inquiries for Alice at the studio. Was it that her aunt, Kyrie's mother, had heard of the death of her son? However, she must know, and, thanking them, she hurried down the stairs, and hailing a cab, told the man to drive to — street.

The old pensioner himself answered the door. Alice, he said, was with the wife who was not very well; but if she would take a seat for a moment she would send her to her.

And as Gussy waited her coming, they knew nothing, she thought. There was no sign of grief on the old soldier's face, as he ushered her into the sitting-room, where hung the cherished sword, and where she had time to take note of all its surroundings before the former appeared. Amongst the pictures, which all had a military bearing, was the likeness of a youth in uniform, which she felt sure from the description she had from Alice was Kyrie himself, now sleeping his last long sleep beneath an African sky. It must have been taken when he first enlisted, for the face was

almost childish, smooth and fair as a girl's. Above it hung a large engraving, the charge of Balaklava, and the death of Nolan, and Gussy was contemplating the latter, and the sad fate of that brave officer, as the door opened and Alice entered the room.

"Oh! Miss Manvers, I am so glad!" she said, as she pressed the hand the former held out to her; but a something in Gussy's face, which she could not hide, suddenly made the gladness to die on her lips.

"You have something [said to tell me, Miss Manvers," she said. "I can read it in your face. Have you heard from the Soudan?" and she waited a moment, expecting to hear from the other, and then added, "Captain DeLorne, is he all right?"

"Captain DeLorne is, as far as we know, safe and well, but—" and Gussy was again at a loss how to convey her message.

"But—but what?" cried Alice, who now realised the motive of the girl's visit. "Tell me, Miss Manvers, tell me, is it Kyrie?" and she clutched her wrist, looking into her eyes for the answer, which, as she remained silent, she saw written there.

"Yes, it is Kyrie," Gussy said, at last, as she knew it to be but torture to withhold a truth she must know sooner or later, as placing the paper in her hands she led her to a seat, that she might there read for herself the name she so loved—his name—amongst the killed.

But as her head was raised from the journal, which she let fall in her lap, not a tear moistened her violet eyes, which were fixed in a stony stare. No cry escaped her lips; every nerve, every feeling within her, apparently paralysed beneath the weight of this cruel blow.

"Don't look like that, Alice," cried Gussy, who now threw herself by the side of the grief-stricken girl; "speak to me, darling. You know I am your friend; won't you speak to me?"

But not a word passed the lips of the other, who appeared unconscious of all but the blow which, like a thunderbolt, had burst over her head.

Poor Gussy had now become so frightened, finding all her powers unavailing, that she was determined to summon assistance, and rising from the position she had taken when endeavouring to rouse her friend, she knocked at the wall which divided the two rooms, and where she rightly conjectured Mr. Buncombe would be in attendance on his wife, whilst Alice was with her.

At first the pensioner paid no attention to the same, but as Gussy continued, much to the detriment of her delicate knuckles, he began to think something must be amiss.

"Oh! Mr. Buncombe, do come here!" said Augusta. "Speak to her, do; I am so frightened."

"Speak to her, frightened! Why, what's the matter, miss?" said the latter, as he approached Alice. "Why, what has made you like this?" but as he took hold of her icy cold hand, which still rested on the paper as it lay on her lap, he cast his eyes over the column she had been reading, and his quick glance running over the same, he no longer required to question his fair visitor as to the cause of his niece's illness.

And Gussy, wishing she had never been the bearer of the sad news, wishing she had remained at "The Laurels" until they had for themselves learnt the dread truth, felt as a culprit whilst surveying the scene before her, and she knew not which was the hardest to witness, the dumb grief of the girl, showing itself alone in her beautiful eyes, from which, for the time being, the light of reason seemed to have fled, or that of the strong man, the heaving of whose bosom told of the agony he was enduring.

"Alice, my girl, wake up," he said, "uncle is here with you. Wake up, there's a dear. Why, what's the matter? Here's Miss Manvers come to see you. Won't you speak to her?"

At the sound of his voice she turned. It seemed to recall her to a sense of the terrible

blow she had suffered, as with the name of Kyrie—Kyrie on her lips—the floodgates of her grief burst forth, and the tears gushed from her eyes, as in tones of anguish she poured forth her sorrow on her uncle's bosom.

"There, there, that's right, cry away, my girl, it'll do you good," said the latter, as he could scarce restrain the tears which ran down his own. "Kyrie is all right, and will be home soon, you'll see. I never believe the papers, and I shan't give up looking for my boy till all is ended, and then if he don't return it'll be time enough to grieve." But all Alice did was to shake her head; she felt it was but too true, and that her uncle, whose big heart was breaking, hoped against hope, for her sake even more than his own.

"But we must keep it from her," he said, as, hiding the paper away, he jerked his head in the direction of the room where his wife was. "She couldn't bear it, poor soul; it would kill her. You just stay here a minute, miss, will you?" he said, addressing Gussy, "whilst I go back to her, or she'll be wondering what's up."

And with the full intention of concocting some innocent fabrication Mr. Buncombe advanced to the door, from which as he closed it behind him, notwithstanding his assertion that he didn't believe a word, could he heard the echo of a suppressed groan of mental agony.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEVERED IMAGINATION.

"I suppose, mother, you read that account of the heroic conduct of Norris DeLorne? If not, here it is," and Douglass Rayson handed the paper in which it appeared to that lady, as with a yawn he arose from the chair in which he had nearly fallen asleep, saying he should take a walk over to "The Laurels."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed when you get there," said his mother, "as that madcap of a girl is off again to London, leaving poor Mrs. Manvers, ill as she is."

"Ill as she fancies herself, you mean," replied Douglass; "but how do you know Miss Manvers is from home?"

"Because I was there myself yesterday, and her mother told me so. She left all of a sudden, giving as a reason that she was obliged to do so, owing to some promise she had made to Captain DeLorne before he went away. But what is this about him?" she asked, as she took up the paper to read the paragraph Douglass had mentioned. "Though I don't take much interest in what relates to the DeLornes now."

"Well, Norris is a good fellow, say what you will," responded her son.

"You stand up for a man who ousted you from a fortune, and left us a little more than beggars! I'm surprised!"

"Really, mother, I don't see how Norris was to blame in the matter; he had nothing to do with his coming into the world—had he now?"

And Douglass could not avoid a smile at his mother's unreasonable antipathy to the young officer.

"Well, I suppose the next thing will be his coming home, marrying Augusta Manvers, and thus lessening the chance of your ever succeeding to his father's estate," said Mrs. Rayson, bitterly.

"It can't be helped if he does," replied Douglass; "but I don't think Gus—Miss Manvers—will be his wife."

"If not that, what is it makes her dance up to London on his account, I should like to know, and what other promise is he likely to have enacted from her?"

"I can't say," replied the son; "but Miss Manvers is engaged to me, mother—a fact I was about to tell you before, when you spoke of Norris."

"You engaged yourself to a penniless girl! Douglass, you must be mad! A nice person's wife she'll make; but I am afraid you will find she will think twice before she exchanges

the soldier with money for the curate with none.

"I firmly believe in Gussy," said Douglass, as shutting the door on his mother he left her to read of Norris DeLorne, as he went out into the warm spring air to weigh deep in his heart the argument raised by the former, why his love should break her troth.

It was strange, he thought, that she should never have mentioned this promise, whatever it was, which she had made her absent cousin, and then to leave Carfield so suddenly. All added to work on his doubts and fears, until the songs of the birds even became irritating to his nerves, as he walked along, tramping down the fresh green grass which bordered each side of the country lane, from the hedges of which the early primroses peeped out their yellow heads.

"How do you do, Rayson? Taking an afternoon stroll?" and Douglass turned, as he shook the extended hand of Charlie Manvers.

"Yes, the day is too lovely to stay indoors; besides, a parson has always some parochial visits to make if he does his duty, you know," said Douglass.

"Of course, if he does," replied the other, smiling. "I had intended joining the first meeting this year of our Archery Club, which takes place to-day had Gus been at home, but she is off again. It is really too bad; one might as well be without a sister, and better, too, then one wouldn't miss her."

And Charlie was not the only one that missed her; Douglass seemed lost. Mr. Manvers declared it was as if there were a death in the house; and Mrs. Manvers was for ever fretting over the ingratitude and thoughtlessness of her daughter, running away from her, in her state of health, and still Gussy stayed on at Lowndes-square.

From the day she had visited the home of the Buncombes, Alice had been seriously ill. The shock to the nervous system was so great that little or no hopes were given of her recovery, and many an hour did Gussy spend beside her bed, listening to the ravings of her disordered brain.

Mr. Buncombe had guarded well from his wife the secret of her illness, and only from the ravings of her niece did she gather that some news of Kyrle had been the cause of the same.

"You ain't deceiving me, Buncombe, are you?" she said one day, after she had been sitting by the bedside of Alice; "it do seem strange to me that she is allus a fancying Kyrle is dead, and that she should a been taken so sudden-like after that young lady left."

"Everything must have a beginning," replied the pensioner, as he turned from his wife, that she might not read on his face the grief which had made it grow thin and worn within the last few days. "Depend on it, the girl has been fretting about the lad all along, until she could not hide it any longer."

"Well, Heaven grant that it may be so," said his wife, as the bell which belonged to their rooms rang from below.

"I'll go, mother," said Buncombe, "may be it is the doctor; it's about his time."

But it was not the doctor; it was Gussy, who, as she shook hands with the old soldier, anxiously inquired after Alice.

"Well, miss, I am afraid there ain't much improvement," replied the former, as he asked her to walk upstairs; "she was only conscious for a few minutes, when she asked if you had been, for she wanted to see you." And a moment or two after Mrs. Buncombe led the way to where the girl rested on her little white bed.

She was asleep as Gussy entered, and very quietly she seated herself by her side, speaking but in low whispers to the former, as she watched for her waking. But though her eyes were closed the busy brain was still at work, showing, by frequent starts and incoherent mutterings, it was active as ever.

At length one imaginary vision clearer than the other caused her to awake, as opening her

eyes, on which was impressed the fear she experienced, she uttered a piercing scream.

"Take them away," she cried, "take them away, they are stabbing him to death! Kyrle! my Kyrle! they have killed you!"

"Hush!" said Gussy, "no one is killing him, Alice. Look up, darling, you are with friends; don't cry like that."

But still her sobs shook her whole frame, as in her wild fancy she bent over the form of the murdered youth.

"That's how she's allus a goin' on, miss," said Mrs. Buncombe, "until I thinks my old man's a deceivin' me. You didn't tell her any bad news of Kyrle did you, Miss Manvers?"

"Hush!" said Gussy, as she listened to the ravings of the prostrate girl, glad to thus avoid answering the other's question.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. "Your head aches? yes, it does ache, but keep quiet, and you will soon be well again. Don't you know me, Alice?" and she wiped the tears from the poor wan face.

"Yes," said the girl, "and it's very late, isn't it? I must have slept a long time, but I must get up now or I shall be late at the studio, and Captain DeLorne must have the photos tinted to-day."

"No, dear, not to-day; you are not very well, you know, and you must rest to please me," and Gussy raised her burning head as she turned the pillow on which it rested. "I will go to the studio for you. Eat a little of this jelly I brought you, and then try to sleep; you will soon be better."

She just touched the spoon as Gussy held it to her lips, and then pushed it away from her, as she started up, her eyes dilated with fear, as she apparently listened for the voice she heard in her imagination.

"Tell him I will be there directly," she said, as she made an attempt to spring from the bed.

"Tell who, Alice?" asked Gussy, "there's no one wanting you, dear," and she gently bade her lie down.

"Yes, yes, don't you hear him calling Alice? It's Kyrle! he has come back! he has come back! I know his voice, and I can hear his footstep on the stairs. Oh! Kyrle, my love! my love!"

"Well, be quite quiet," said Gussy, as she readjusted the coverings, "and Kyrle shall come to see you; but you must go to sleep for a little time first."

And long, long she sat by the sick girl's bed, listening to the fancies which were ever working in her fevered brain, until at last her breathing denoted she had fallen into a quiet slumber.

"I will be here to-morrow, Mrs. Buncombe," she said, as bidding the good woman good-bye, and telling her to cheer up, she rose to leave.

But gently as the door was closed behind her, it had awakened the sufferer from her transient slumber, and Gussy could hear her talking to an imaginary companion as she descended the stairs.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN.

THE next day Gussy was again at the Buncombes to inquire for Alice, but before she had asked the question she knew from the expression on the faces of the old people that there was no improvement.

"Oh! miss, I am afraid we shall lose her," said Mrs. Buncombe, as she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes. "It do seem hard, it do, to have both our children taken from us at the same time," and the poor woman sobbed aloud; "but there's Dr. Moore," she said, as a knock and ring were heard at the street door. "Sit down a minute, miss, whilst I send my old man in, and go with the doctor to my poor girl's room."

And Gussy was struck with the change which had taken place in the old pensioner since the day she had lit upon their home,

as she considered herself, like a bird of ill-omen.

His face had become drawn and furrowed, as if with premature old age; his hair, which before had only been streaked with grey, was perfectly white, the sorrow of the last few weeks having added years to his appearance.

Alice, his dead brother's child, was as dear to him as though she had been his own flesh and blood. As a little wailing infant they had taken her from her mother's arms as that mother fell lifeless when the news of her husband's death was brought to her, and she had grown up knowing no other love but theirs, sharing the same with their own boy. And as he spoke to Gussy of the great fear they now had that she would be taken from them, a wail of anguish broke from the strong man's heart.

The door soon opened, and the doctor, who had just left the sick chamber, entered the room. His face was very grave, and Gussy could read the sentence he was about to utter before the words had left his lips. Yes, she knew; she felt it was the sentence of death on the girl she had learned to love, as she would have loved the sister she had so longed at times to possess. And was this the way, she thought, she had kept her promise to Norris?

"Don't be afraid, doctor," said Buncombe. "Tell me the truth. Is there no hope, sir?" and he turned his head to hide the tears which had risen to his eyes.

"Buncombe," replied the Doctor, as, advancing to where the former stood, he laid his hand upon his shoulder, "You are a soldier; you must bear this blow as a soldier should. Your niece may live, but—"

"But what? Oh, doctor, thank Heaven for that hope!"

"She will never regain her reason. Only one thing would save her, and that is impossible—the return of the dead!"

"But, doctor, should it be possible. Should it still be that my boy lives! Oh, Heaven, thou art too merciful to deal to me this double blow!" and as he sank into a chair his heavy frame shaking with the sobs, which told of the agony of his sufferings, the former gazed on him in his sorrow, when, heaving a sigh—a sigh of sympathy for his fellow-man—with a bow to Gussy he left the room.

And Alice lay still—very still. As the latter followed Mrs. Buncombe to her room the wild delirium of the preceding days seemed to have vanished, leaving in its stead a melancholy calm; her beautiful eyes, from which the light of reason seemed to have vanished, wandering around the apartment, and then resting on the door as though in expectancy, whilst the tears would ever and anon course each other down her pale face.

She appeared almost unconscious of Gussy's presence, only looking wonderingly on her, as sitting by her bedside she endeavoured to arouse her attention.

Week passed week, and there appeared no change for the better, but as the days passed she gradually became weaker and weaker, until the fear remained that prostration would complete the work the fever had left undone.

The weather had become suddenly warm, and the sun threw its cheery rays, speaking of fresh life and hope, into the sick chamber, whilst Gussy would ever bring bright flowers, and place them by her bedside, only staying away a day or two when it was expedient that she should be at "The Laurels," when she would give orders that they should be sent by the florist, and Mrs. Buncombe would arrange them in her stead.

At these times Alice would appear conscious of her loss, as far as her clouded brain would allow her to do. She would miss the girl's light footstep and the gentle pressure of her soft hand.

And thus the weeks passed by, the girl growing weaker and weaker as each day came and closed, although as the end was drawing near her mind appeared again to assert itself,

and she became gradually to realise what was passing around her.

"Where have I been, aunt?" she asked, one day, as Mrs. Buncombe sat by her bedside. "It seems as though I had been away from you all, and that I wanted to get back and could not, a something ever coming between me and you."

"Hush, darling!" said her Aunt. "You have been very, very ill, Alice."

"Ill! Yes," she replied, "I have been ill, but last night, auntie, an angel came to me in my dreams and bade me live for him—for Kyrle, aunt—for Kyrle is not dead. No, no, I saw him, too, as he lay on the bare ground, with the blood welling from a deep wound here," and she pointed to her shoulder, "and he told me not to fret, for he was coming back, and he raised himself that his lips might meet mine, and then I awoke."

"Well, keep very quiet, that you may be well when he does return," and Mrs. Buncombe disposed the pillows afresh, waiting only till the weary lids drooped over the violet eyes, and then she told her husband of the change that had taken place in their beloved girl.

"A forerunner of death," he thought, as he listened to his wife's account of Alice's returning reason, and the joy which the latter experienced was but transient, as far from noting any improvement—the life of the invalid seemed to be slowly ebbing away.

Gussy had again returned to town, and had come, as she thought, to take a last farewell of her friend.

She stood at the foot of the bed, her eyes suffused with tears, as she gazed on the wasted form before her, and listened to the painful breathing, which was distinctly heard in the next apartment. Mrs. Buncombe was still seated by her side, watching, as she feared, every breath to be her last, when the sound of a commotion from below for the moment distracted her attention from the dying girl; the tread of a hasty footstep on the stairs, the opening of the adjoining door, and her husband's voice as he uttered the name of Kyrle.

All seemed to her for the moment as the wild imagining of a dream, until, vacating her post in favour of Gussy, she rushed to the next room to be clasped in the arms of her darling son.

Yes, it was Kyrle—black, travel-stained, and weary, wearing on his thin, worn face marks of privation and sufferings which he had undergone. But still, Kyrle alive—once more home—home with all that was dearest to him on earth.

But as he disengaged himself from his mother's embrace there was someone he missed in that home welcome.

"Where was Alice?" he asked, as his eyes wandered round the room.

There hung her hat, as she was accustomed to place it when she returned from business. But where was she that she did not come to him and rush into his arms, as he had dreamt she would do? But his mother was unable to tell him the sad news for the sobs which choked her utterance, until, again repeating the question, he looked from one to the other for the answer which came not.

"Father, what is it?" he asked, wildly. "For Heaven's sake, tell me where is Alice! Is she—?" But he could not bring his lips to articulate the dread fear which had taken possession of his mind.

"No, not that, my boy!" said Mr. Buncombe, who divined what he would say—"not that, but dying, Kyrle, my son—dying!"

For an instant the young man stood as though paralysed, and, then dropping into a seat, he groaned in his agony, as his father told him how Alice had been shattered by the sorrow which overcame her on that day when she had read his name among the slain. How she had raved of him—only him—until at last reason was tossed from her throne; and although she lived it was but as the setting left of the gem that was lost, until a few days

since, when, as the last flicker of a candle before it dies out for ever, a ray of reason had returned to her darkened mind.

"But there is one hope left now," he continued. "May the Heaven which has sent you back to us by your presence restore her, Kyrle. The doctor said it was the only thing which would save her. Oh, merciful Heaven! grant that it may!"

Gussy could scarce suppress an exclamation of surprise as, later on, Mrs. Buncombe re-entered the sick chamber, accompanied by her son—as instinctively she knew he was such; but although much as she would have liked to have witnessed the effect his presence would have on Alice she felt it was a time when a stranger should not be there; and with a pressure of the thin, transparent hand of the latter, and a whispered adieu to the mother, with a promise she would be there in the morning, she tripped down the stairs and was soon back at Lowndes-square.

For a time Kyrle, shielded by the curtain—which position he had taken when entering the sick girl's room—watched, unseen by the invalid, the face which was so dear to him, fearing, at the same time, that he longed to make her aware of his presence.

"Sit down, Kyrle," said his mother, in a whisper; "you look so weary."

But almost inaudibly as the name had been uttered it fell on the ears of the sufferer, as fixing her eyes on Mrs. Buncombe,—

"Who said Kyrle?" she asked. "I thought I saw him, aunt. Why, is it he comes to me, and goes before I can even press his hand?"

"Alice," said her aunt, "if I brought Kyrle to you would you be very quiet, and try to get well for his sake?"

The girl turned her head, opening her eyes, which had become so large, to their full extent, as seizing the hands of the former she partly raised herself in the bed.

"I will, I will!" she cried, excitement giving a latent strength to her voice. "Oh! Kyrle, my love, my love!"

And gently drawing the curtain aside,—

"I am here, darling!" he said "Alice, my own Alice, don't you know me?"

But she shuddered as their eyes met, and the mind, which but tottered on a swaying pedestal, appeared again as though it would become displaced; and the agony depicted on the lad's countenance was even sadder to gaze on than the bewildered reason of the former endeavouring to assert itself.

But at last a gleam came into the violet eyes, a ray of pleasure as a fitting sunbeam passed over her face, as throwing her wasted arms around the neck of her lover she burst into a torrent of tears.

"You will never leave me again?" she asked, between her sobs. "You will not come to me as you used to do, and then go, leaving but a weary waste in my heart? Say you will never leave me—never—never?"

"Never, darling," he answered, as bidding her for his sake to be quiet, or they would take him away from her, he gently replaced her head on the pillow.

And long, long he sat by her side, telling her, in low whispers, of the love for which she must try to live; that he should never leave her, but that when she got well they would together go out in the bright sunshine, and listen once more to the songs of the birds as they warbled to the praise of their Maker, who had sent them each back from the valley of the shadow of death to pass their lives together.

But although each day brought improvement, still many a day passed over their heads before Kyrle could tell her, for her mind fully to convey the meaning, of the narrow escape he had had from the grim monster; of the death of Noles, the man with whom he had travelled to Portsmouth the day he left, and how his name had been reported in his stead in the list of those who were killed; how, after recovering from his wound, he had again been struck down by fever, until he was deemed unfit for service, and was invalided home.

The doctor had ceased his visits now.

Plenty of beef-tea, chops, and wine, he said, was his prescription, and a walk from one room to the other leaning on the arm of Kyrle. But still no Gussy; and she began to despair of again seeing her kind, dear face when one morning a letter was delivered, addressed in her name. It was deeply edged with black, and Mr. and Mrs. Buncombe had a long argument whether it would be wise to let her have it, which ended in its being given into her hands.

"DEAR ALICE,"—it ran—"I hope and pray that you are better, as having had no tidings through your aunt and uncle, who had my address; I sincerely trust you are. I shall call at — street morrow.—Ever your true friend,
"AUGUSTA MANVERS."

And on the morrow she came—a little, black-robed figure, her bright hair shining beneath her craped hat, and a shade of sorrow on her fair face, which was so unusual to be resting there. Even the old pensioner started as he took her extended hand, and proved to her by the cloud which had lifted from his brow that Alice still lived.

"I am so glad," she said, and the tears started to her blue eyes, as the next moment Alice entered the room, to be clasped in her friend's arms.

"Oh! Miss Manvers," she exclaimed, as her eyes fell on the dress of mourning, "you have had sorrow, and that is why you did not come to see me. Tell me, is it not so?"

"Yes, dear," she replied; "but thank Heaven, you are spared to us. Oh! Alice, you have much to be thankful for."

"Indeed I have," was the reply, "and Heaven grant I may never forget it. But will you tell me of your grief, though I fear by your face I can only too plainly read my answer. Tell me, is Captain DeLorne—"

"Dead, yes," answered Gussy, finishing the sentence her companion had let remain unfinished, as the tears she could no longer control coursed each other down her face.

"Yes," she continued, "poor brave Norris! The day I left you here so ill we received the sad news of his death. It was a dreadful blow to his mother, with whom I have been ever since; but I was anxious to know how you were, so came before leaving London, which I do to-morrow. But, Alice, I am so glad," and she threw her arms around her friend's neck, "that, after all your troubles, you have at last found a haven of rest, for I have heard from Mr. Buncombe of Kyrle's return."

And then Alice told her of all the latter had gone through, and how that it was through Captain DeLorne he got sent back to England, instead of being left to die in the desert; that through his influence it was he obtained his discharge, and returned to save her; and Gussy listened, the tears welling to her soft, blue eyes, as she heard of his goodness—he who had been to her more than brother.

CHAPTER X.

PEACE AT LAST.

As Mrs. DeLorne had predicted, Mrs. Rayson was aware of the death of Norris on the day she visited his mother in Lowndes-square, previous to the latter having received the sad intelligence, which was brought to her by that evening's post.

At first she could scarcely realise the loss she had sustained; and when it dawned upon her, the full extent of her misery, not a tear or a sob escaped her bosom. She sat as one paralysed beneath the burden of her grief, until Gussy's tender sympathy aroused her from her lethargy. "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away," and to His will she bowed her grey head, the agony she was enduring alone showing itself in her drawn face and furrowed brow, suddenly grown so old.

"I told you so, dear," she said one day to Gussy, as she referred to Mrs. Rayson's visit

"Did I not say it presaged misfortune? Well, she has obtained her heart's desire at last."

"But you shall never leave the home which has been yours so long, auntie," replied her niece.

"My darling, it must be," she said, as she caressed Gussy's golden head nestled so close to hers. "It matters little to me now he is gone."

"No, no, auntie," replied the girl; "there is a secret I have kept from you till now," and then she told her how she and Douglas had long pledged their troth one to the other—that Mr. Manvers had given his consent.

"But Mrs. Rayson?" asked her aunt in surprise.

"Oh, Mrs. Rayson must bend to the inevitable," replied Gussy; "for if Douglas wants her to live with us I shall not marry him at all."

And of course Douglass gave in to the little girl who had promised to be his. He was to give up Carfield to some other curate less fortunate than himself, and when time, the saviour for every sorrow, should have mitigated that which they all (save Mrs. Rayson) felt for the young officer lying in his desert grave, they were to be married, and live at Lowndes-square, where Mrs. DeLorne was still to remain.

At first Mrs. Rayson felt herself much injured at this arrangement; but as Douglass has shown her a pretty, semi-detached villa new to let, which he has entered into negotiations to purchase for her sole property, it being near The Laurels, she is satisfied, as she and Mrs. Manvers have become fast friends.

And the old pensioner, who has become himself again, is also much occupied in the selection of furniture, every now and then asking his wife's advice, as well as soliciting her aid, in the purchase of the adjuncts necessary to the home of a young couple, whilst he laughingly tells Kylie and Alice to do the billing and cooing, and he and mother will provide the nest.

Douglass has even now begun to take the place in Mrs. DeLorne's heart of her lost boy, and she tells Mr. Manvers she regrets that she misjudged him in the past, for she could not wish her darling niece a happier lot than she has chosen for herself.

"I just knew how it would be," said Charlie, when he heard the turn affairs had taken. "Not that it much matters; for all we see of Gus we might as well be without a sister."

And Gussy has told Douglass now why it was that she so suddenly left Carfield on that day when he and his mother visited The Laurels, a confession which has made him this time go to London.

"You know my mother is not very strong," he tells her on his return, "and so—"

"So what?" asks Gussy, in surprise.

"I have arranged with Kylie Buncombe, when he and Alice are married, that they shall live as her attendants at the Villa, and do all that is necessary for her comfort with the assistance of a servant."

Gussy has no trouble now, and she thinks even poor Norris would sleep happier in his distant grave could he but have known how well she has kept her promise.

[THE END.]

FACTILE.

A bad boy calls himself compass, because he is boxed so often.

The young man who always finds something good in the newspaper is he who carries his lunch wrapped up in it.

"Are these pure conaries?" asked a young gentleman who was negotiating a gift for his fair—"Yes, sir," said the dealer confidently; "I raised them 'ere birds from canary seed."

"Her eyes," remarked the proof-reader, "are her strongest attraction. They draw your attention and admiration in spite of yourself." "Ah, yes," replied the cashier, "a kind of a sight draft, as you might say."

"Can dogs find their way home from a distance?" is a question frequently asked. A practical man answers the query thus—"It's according to the dog. If it's one you want to get rid of he can find his way back from Cumberland. If it is a good one, he's apt to get lost if he goes around the corner."

FEMININE PERSPICACITY.—"You may say what you like, mother; George no longer loves me." "But child, how did you get that silly notion into your head?" "Oh very simply and only too quickly! When he takes me home nowadays he always chooses the shortest road!"

A LOVE-LORN and youthful writer says:—"I pressed her gentle form to me, and whispered in her ear, if, when I was far away, she'd drop for me a tear? I paused for some cheering words, my throbbing heart to cool, and with her rosy lips she said, 'O Mike, you're such a fool!'"

APPLICANT (to the landlady): "I am willing to pay a good price, madam, but I am very particular about my food. I am under the doctor's care constantly, and suffer dreadfully with dyspepsia." Landlady: "Oh, I'm sure you will be pleased with my table if that is the case, sir. My boarders all have dyspepsia."

WOMAN'S "cruelty to woman has made thousands fail to speak to each other. Cicely had just dropped in to congratulate her friend on pleasant prospects directly after Lent. "Oh, I'm so glad for you, my dear! Augustus always was such charming company. Oh, he's very nice! He paid me marked attention half-a-dozen years ago." "Indeed! I believe I've heard him say something about your being a very dear friend of his mother." The coffee cream froze in the little, quaint pitcher on the table. So did the morning's conversation.

He took her hand in his and poured into her ear the soft, sweet story, told over and over again since he world was young. "Do you love me?" he inquired. "Don't ask me co-mundrams," she replied. "But I love you, darling," he went on, "and I have given you my whole heart. I have kept none of it back. It is all yours, all yours." "Mine to do just what I please with?" she asked, in the sweet simplicity of girl-womanhood. "Yes, darling." "Then I shall give it to Mary Martin. She wants it, I know, and I haven't any use for yours and Bob Brown's too, and Bob gave me his last night. You are too late."

DUST.

Too much learning is like too much dinner—fatulent and indigestible.

Most people think with their tongues.

Opinions have no market value; the supply is always so much in excess of the demand.

If gravity is wisdom, all the owls would be professors.

Genius can't be controlled; it makes its own laws, and breaks them to suit its pleasure.

Ingratitude is a crime against one man, and an insult to all.

Most of the writers write for bread only—stale bread at that.

Honest poverty is a most noble condition of life.

The best servants are those who only know what they are told, and don't forget it.

If to live and to die is all there is of it, oh, what a fate is ours.

I don't take but little stock in the purely literary culture of the day, enny boddy can have all my stock for one good square meal of old-fashioned common sense.

No man has ever lived who could brake with impunity one single law of nature.

Ambush is an animal that never knows when it is satisfied.

JOHN BILLINGS.

A poet writes, "Oh, let me shed a tear!" We join in his appeal. Let him shed a tear; let him shed two tears—one out of each eye! And then let some one hit him five times out of a possible four with a blunderbus!

A HANDSOME young Yorkshire pedlar made love to a buxom widow in Lancashire. He accompanied his declaration with an allusion to two impediments to their union. "Name them," said the widow. "The want of means to set up a retail shop." They parted, and the widow sent the pedlar ample means. When they met again, the pedlar had taken and stocked his shop; and the smiling fair one begged to know the other impediment. "I have another wife," cried the pedlar.

"I OFTEN think, Brown, of the affectionate pair you and your wife were before marriage. How do you find it now, after ten years of double harness, old fellow?" "We were pretty affectionate then, were we not?" "You were, indeed." "Well, it's much the same still—with a slight difference." "How is that?" "I was pretty badly smitten before marriage, and I've been pretty badly smitten ever since—the only difference being in the manner of smiting."

YOUNG ladies who adopt a semi-masculine garb should take warning by a recent occurrence in a country church. A couple came in, dressed alike in ulsters and round hats, and, on being shown to a pew, one of them immediately doffed his hat. The pew-opener waited a reasonable time for the other to show the same token of respect, and at last, out of patience, he reached over and knocked off the offending hand-gear, when to his horror he found he had uncovered the curly head of a young lady.

THERE is a good story told of a contemporary novelist who became so ill that his wife was obliged to engage a night nurse to attend him. At 1 a.m. his wife went into his bedroom and found the nurse reading. "Who gave that woman a book?" she asked in a whisper. "I, my dear." "What book?" "My last work." "Good gracious!" cried madam with alarm. "How imprudent! Don't you know it is necessary for her to keep awake?"

A PARTY of vegetarians were strolling through a meadow where a herd of cattle were grazing, when one of the beasts, becoming furious at the sight of a red shawl worn by a young lady, chased her with such fury that she only just managed to escape with her life over a stile at the end of the meadow. "You horrid, bloodthirsty brute!" cried the girl, trembling in every limb, as she watched the infuriated animal on the other side of the hedge; "this is your gratitude to me for touching nothing but vegetables for the last six months! From to-day I shall begin to eat roast beef again!"

A SCOTCH farmer once took his wife to see the wonders of the microscope. The various curiosities pleased the woman very well, till the animalcules professed to be found in a drop of water were shown. These seemed to poor Janet not so pleasant a sight as the others. She sat patiently, however, till the water-tigers magnified to the size of twelve feet, appeared on the sheet, fighting with their usual ferocity. Janet now rose in great trepidation, and cried: "Come awa, John." "Sit still, woman, and see the show," said John. "See the show, man! What wud come o' us if the awa' like things should brak out o' the water?"

THE other day such a beautiful young lady, eyes like midnight, hair like a raven's wing, brow like alabaster, lips like coral, purse like an overland mail pouch, went into a Regent-street drapers, and asked to see some corn-coloured silk. The young man flinched painfully behind the counter and handed her a piece of scarlet. "I said corn-colour," she murmured. The young salesman hesitated and fidgeted. "Well, by dad," he exclaimed, "that's the prevailing colour of all my corns." And by the time the proprietor could hurry over to ask what was the matter, she was out of the door and half a mile away.

SOCIETY.

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR eats his first dinner at the Middle Temple as a student on June 10. He will take his seat amongst his fellow-students.

THE HEREDITARY GRAND DUKE OF BADEN, grandson of the Emperor of Germany (son of his only daughter), has been betrothed to the Princess Hilda of Nassau. The bridegroom elect is 28 years of age, and a major *à la suite* in the first regiment of Foot-guards; the fiancée, aged 20, is a daughter of a former Duke of Nassau, whose territory was annexed by Prussia in 1866.

THE MARQUESS OF DOWNHIRE's seat at Brooknell has been placed at the disposal of the Prince and Princess of Wales for the Ascot week.

THE dresses worn at the private views at the Grosvenor and Royal Institute Galleries were not quite so elaborate as on some previous occasions. The Duchess of Medlenburg-Strelitz (Princess Augusta of Cambridge) wore nut-brown cashmere, bordered with trimming of a lighter shade of velours frieze, black silk dolman, and fancy chapeau de paille, with brown aigrette, and white veil. The Duchess of Westminster was in a costume of black cashmere and Ottoman silk. Miss Mary Anderson wore a new shade of grey, with Henry III. hat of dark green velvet. The Countess of Walsingham was in black broché velvet, with bonnet of lace, and primrose feathers. One of the most notable dresses we observed was of pale sea-green cashmere and plush; while another elegant costume was of speckled rich green and red Cheviot, in which was woven a gold thread; green bonnet, trimmed with feathers, one brightly-plumaged bird being raised high in front, as if about to take flight.

MISS CHARLOTTE COOPER, daughter of J. Fenimore Cooper, the novelist, died suddenly at Coopers-town, New York, recently, aged 68. Since her father's death, in 1851, this lady, who has been somewhat of an invalid all her life, has lived with her two sisters, Mrs. Richards and Miss Susan Cooper. The latter lady was taken suddenly and violently ill the previous Friday, and it is thought the shock of her sister's illness caused Miss Charlotte's death. Miss Susan, who is 70 years of age, is a charitable lady of considerable literary ability.

THE DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE sent a memento of Primrose Day to the Queen at Villa Motet; it consisted of a painting, by Mrs. Harrison, of a wreath of primroses on an ebony panel, framed in violet plush.

GLADYS COUNTESS OF LONSDALE, with her child, has been passing the winter in the south of France. Her marriage with the Earl de Grey, who is not, like his father, a Roman Catholic, took place recently, and they are to live at Nooton, Lord Ripon's seat in Lincolnshire.

THE name of Sir Edward Malet, received a dowry of £150,000 from her father, and from her mother a fortune in diamonds alone, as well as a quantity of rich and priceless lace. Some marvellously fine Honiton point which had previously trimmed the bridal dress of the Lady Ermyntre's mother, the Duchess of Bedford, upwards of forty years ago (1844), now adorns a pale blue satin dress with a train of velvet brocade, upon which small roses, in the softest possible shades of yellow and apricot are strewn upon a ground of blue satin, belonging to the *trousseau*. Neither Sir Edward nor Lady Malet are strangers in Berlin; the latter, singularly enough, succeeds her own aunt, Lady Amphill, as Ambassa-

STATISTICS.

BRITISH LOSSES IN RECENT BATTLES.—Of the twenty-four or twenty-five battles fought by British troops during the past eleven years, including all those in the Ashanti, Afghan, Zululand, and Egyptian campaigns, the number of casualties has exceeded in only three instances the total of 56 killed and 170 wounded inflicted on us during the desperate encounter of Hasehen. Of these three, two were disasters of a character happily very rare in the annals of the British army—namely Isardlana and Maiwand. In the former case our total force of 23 officers, 500 men, and 1,000 natives were annihilated; and on the occasion of the disastrous defeat and retreat of General Burrough's command, our loss amounted to 21 officers, 300 English, and 700 natives killed, and 15 officers and 90 men missing. The third case in which our loss was heavier than at Baker's seroba was at Tel-el-Kehir, where 9 officers and 45 men were killed, and 22 officers and 320 men wounded, and even here the number of killed was less than that in the battle of Hasehen. In this respect, however, both the two last-named are exceeded by Majuba Hill, where 85 were killed; Leing's Nek, 81; Tama, 91; and Abu Klea, 74 killed.

GEMS.

It is impossible to ascertain how far virtue will predominate until opposed by temptation.

Let friendship creep gently to a height; if it rush to it, it may soon run itself out of breath.

One gains courage by showing himself poor; in that manner one robs poverty of its sharpest sting.

COMMON-SENSE does not ask an impossible chessboard, but takes the one before it, and plays the game.

A PROMISE should be given with caution, and kept with care. It should be made with the heart, and remembered by the head.

PRIDE, like the magnet, constantly points to one object, itself; but, unlike the magnet, it has no attractive pole, but at all points repels.

Love, in its varied phases, can acquire purity or dignity only when guided by an inward power over ourselves; that is in itself the very germ of virtue.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ONION SAUCE.—Peel and boil tender as many onions as you require for the sauce. Squeeze out the water, chop, and pour on carefully melted butter and a little milk. Boil up once. A turnip boiled with the onions makes it milder.

LEMON TOAST.—Beat the yolks of three eggs, and mix with them half-a-pint of milk; dip slices of bread into the mixture, then fry them a delicate brown in boiling butter. Take the whites of the eggs, beat them to a froth, add to them three ounces of white sugar and the juice of a small lemon. Stir in a small teaspoonful of boiling water, and serve as a sauce over the toast.

STEW OR MUTTON.—Cut the cold cooked mutton into pieces; trim off the sinew, gristle and skin, and put them into a saucepan; pour over them a pint of boiling water; cover and let stew for an hour, then strain off the water upon the pieces of mutton. When the mutton is well heated, stir in it one tablespoonful of butter rolled in one teaspoonful of browned flour. Season with pepper, salt, and half an onion, cover tightly and stew for half-an-hour, and serve. Irish potatoes may be cut in small pieces and added.

MISCELLANEOUS.

BOOK-PRODUCTION OF GERMANY.—During the past year there were published in Germany 15,607 books, pamphlets, &c., showing an increase of 800 compared with the previous year.

GIRLS.—A French writer says that the French woman is more graceful and piquant than the English woman; but she is less healthy and less fresh. She has livelier eyes, a prettier mouth, a better figure; but her skin is less fair and clear. Walking and bathing, this is the secret of the beauty and healthfulness of the English women. They fear neither baths nor draughts. They sleep with open windows, and in the morning they deluge themselves with cold water. In winter the more timid take a sponge bath, and rub themselves from head to foot to stimulate circulation, till the skin cries for mercy. The appetite thus sharpened they go down to breakfast fresh and vigorous, make a good meal of eggs and cold meat, and then start for a country walk or a game of lawn-tennis. Among the prettiest English girls are those who serve in the shops. The great dealers and merchants only employ young and attractive women in their shops, and the spectacle of these young girls, independent, respectable, even distinguished-looking, is one of the pleasantest and most instructive of the great city.

THE GREEK MAID.—When the Turks captured the Grecian Island of Candia, they found two girls of remarkable beauty and accomplishments, whom they carried off as slaves to the Turkish Seraglio. One of them had a circle of friends and acquaintances, the other was an orphan, with few friends and no relatives. They were, however, devotedly attached to each other, having resided together from infancy. After having dwelt some time in the harem, the orphan girl, by making strenuous exertions, and at the imminent peril of her life, saved the life of a Turkish princess. When this came to the ears of the Sultan he ordered her to be brought before him, assuring her that however hard her request it should be granted. She modestly but nobly refused the gifts he proffered her, but pleaded eloquently, not for her own freedom, but for that of her friend, picturing in lively colours the joy which would fill the hearts of her parents were she restored to them. The Sultan was moved to tears. "Go, generous girl," said he, "go back to the home of your youth, and take with you the friend for whom you would sacrifice yourself, and without whom even freedom would be slavery."

THE MARRIAGE FAIR IN BRITAIN.—The marriage fair, the institution of which dates from time immemorial, is still held annually in Britain. In pursuance of the singular custom, all the marriageable girls with a dowry from that and neighbouring villages, dressed in their best finery, climb on the parapet of the bridge, on which they sit in rows. Naturally enough, all of them are anxious to win a suitor. They, therefore, vie with each other in showing their personal attractions. One shows a fine waist; another allows a pretty foot and ankle to peep out from under her dress; a third bares a shapely arm, while a fourth exhibits a forest of long hair. The eager youths soon advance along the footway of the bridge and examine the eligible girls. They, too, are at great pains to make the best possible impression—this one curling an incipient moustache, that one throwing back his thick locks, and others, again, walking to show off their upright bearing. When one of them fancies one of the girls he steps up to her and offers his hand to help her to alight from the parapet. If he is to her taste she takes the proffered hand, jumps down, and negotiations at once begin with the parents standing by. Should all inquiries turn out satisfactory on both sides the young couple strike each other's open hand and the affair is concluded. The marriage follows soon after.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. H. T.—We cannot oblige you.
H. S.—Certainly, if you practise sufficiently.
J. S.—It depends on whether he left a will or not.
R. N. A.—Cancel the agreement at once.
C. B. W.—Can you believe what he says or not? If not have no more to do with him.
VIOLET E. J.—Pleasant face well photographed. Hair golden auburn. Handwriting very good.

CYLINDER.—Your father, or whoever is now the head of the family, should consult a respectable solicitor.

BOOK WORM.—Ledgers are usually kept; but you might try some wholesale wastepaper dealers.

EVIE M.—We do not know of any dye of the kind named that would not be injurious, and we must, therefore, respectfully decline to give it.

AN AFFLICTED GIRL.—1. Consult a medical man at once, it is a very serious thing. 2. Yes, in most civilised countries.

ARTHUR B.—1. Take an early opportunity to tell her frankly the state of your affections. 2. It is a foreign title.

LILLIAN M.—Choose the one you love best, and wait till he proposes. Very good writing, and quite suitable to the purpose named.

S. J. W.—It is improbable that the matter can now be remedied. Write, however, to the Registrar-General, Somerset House, London.

CURLYHEAD.—A mixture of tincture of cantharides, essence of rosemary, and sweet oil is a good thing to promote the growth of the hair. A chemist will tell you the proportions.

TWO COUSINS.—1. No. 2. Yes, if not too long or too broad. 3. See recent numbers. 4. They are caused by some little derangement of the system. 5. Not unless he is a very intimate friend of the family. 6. Fair.

C. B. M.—The Tam O'Shanter is especially becoming to growing girls, and should be made of dark velvet with a bright tip, pompon, or heron's plumes on the left side. Another style of headgear for young girls has the peaked front covered with a full puffing, high crown surrounded by a twist of velvet strings, and a cockade bow on top.

A. G. H.—It would be less unpleasant to the young men to have you speak to them about their staying so late than it would be for your parents to do so. You can refer to your parents' feelings about the matter in an easy, good-natured way that would not give offence, whereas, if your father should speak to them at all about it, his doing so would be apt to seem like a rebuke.

C. L. R.—A Highland costume would prove a most appropriate one for a skating carnival. It consists of a skirt of Scotch plaid, bound with brown velvet; a tunic of plaid, with sporran and leather belt. Brown velvet bodice, with revers and centre of sleeves of brown cashmere; a scarf of bright plaid fastened on the shoulder with a Cairngorm brooch; a Scotch bonnet or cap, with bright wing-feathers and ornament on the left side. Bright plaid hose and brown shoes, foxed and striped with black leather.

R. C. F.—Suppose you try these lines from Moore's "Lalla Rookh":

"Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love!
Hearts that the world in vain had tried,
And sorrow but more closely tied,
That stood the storm when waves were rough,
But in a sunny hour fell off,
Like ships that have gone down at sea
When heaven was all tranquillity."

W. M. D.—Steel engraving, in what may be considered the mechanical branches of the art, such as making plates and dies, is better paid than the corresponding class of work in wood-cutting, but either trade is a good one to learn if you have an aptitude for them. Those who have natural artistic gifts and industry to raise them to the top rank earn good incomes. The steel engraver has the advantage of being able to turn to artistic metal work. Many of the large manufacturers of silverware employ a large force of engravers on metal.

S. W.—Here is a simple and effectual way of cleaning hair-brushes and combs: Wash the bristles for a few seconds in a weak solution of hartshorn, say a table-spoonful to a pint of cold water. Then rinse in clean cold water and dry. Do not place the brush near the fire, nor in the sun, but after shaking it well set it on the point of the handle in a shady place. Be careful to keep the back of the brush from contact with the hartshorn solution, as it is very apt to discolour the wood. Proceed in the same manner when cleaning combs, with the exception of drying, which should be done with a cloth or soft sponge.

D. V. P.—1. Candour compel us to say that you have as yet scarcely the culture of thought and expression demanded from those who would enter into the literary viaseyard with any hope of success. This cannot be secured at one bound, and in justice to themselves and their surroundings those who would run in the race of letters must train themselves beforehand by a rigid course of study. One of the greatest requisites in writing for the press is not to be found in the articles

before us—viz., a knowledge of grammatical construction and spelling, which latter, in some instances, is simply execrable. The candidate for literary honours at the present day has to contend with herculean minds, thoroughly trained in the necessities of the art, and need not look for encouragement until his work is of such a nature as to command it.

W. G. F.—Accept as much attention from other young men as your friend pays to other young ladies; this will probably lead to an explanation of his feelings towards you, and if the explanation should prove unsatisfactory, having other friends will enable you to bear your disappointment more easily.

J. B. W.—The hair is still dressed rather high, leaving the nape of the neck uncovered, save by the little soft curls now so popular. The throat is thus left free for the very high collars now worn. Where a high coronet coiffure is becoming, the hair is arranged in Japanese coils, run through with jewel-headed pins, for full-dress occasions.

R. M. D.—If you should resume your correspondence with her on the footing of what she calls "the old friendly intercourse," and say nothing about your love, the probability is that, after a while, she would wish to take on a warmer character, and be willing to listen to your declarations of affection and an offer of marriage. The experiment would certainly be worth trying.

D. F. N.—1. The best satinwood comes from the East Indies and from Guinea; the West Indies furnish some very good wood. 2. The colour is yellow of various shades, the wood from Guinea being the lightest and brightest. 3. The true satinwood trees are handsome trees, fifty or sixty feet high, and related to the mahogany tree. 4. The wood is used for fine cabinet work, and the backs of brushes.

JOHN M.—Such careless observations as you made would be quite insufficient to establish any point, and you should have enough knowledge of the structure of animals to know that the transformation of a horse hair into a snake is something so very unlikely that nothing but repeated observations, by independent observers, would justify you in considering it possible.

THE FIRST ROSE OF SUMMER.

Shielded from harm in some warm sheltered place,
Half fearful of the sun that calls it forth,
Dreading the bitter winds from east and north,
The first sweet rose of summer shows its face.

And lo! such beauties in its youth we trace,
That its new-opening bud is flower far
Than those more grandly-perfect blossoms are
That later summer dowers with queenly grace.

So fair to see is maidenhood that goes
With half-unconscious steps upon the way
That marks her laughing childhood's happy close;
For truth and purity are her array.
And, full of grace, like summer's first sweet flower,
She reigns a queen long ere she knows her power.

E. W.

M. T. C.—1. Rose-water made by easily made by taking half-an-ounce of powdered white sugar and two drachms of magnesia, and mixing with them twelve drops of attar of roses. Add a quart of water and two ounces of alcohol, mixed in a gradual manner, and filter the whole through blotting paper. 2. It is said that the use of flowers of sulphur as a tooth-powder will prevent toothache, and have a beneficial effect on teeth and gums.

MARY M. W.—1. In the year 1609, John Robinson, a pious pastor of a flock in the North of England, who would not conform to the rituals of the Established Church in that country, fled, with his people, to Holland, to avoid persecution. They felt that they were only pilgrims, or wanderers, and assumed that name. Toward the close of 1620 about 100 of them, including women and children, arrived on the shores of Cape Cod Bay in the ship *Mayflower*, and planted a colony where the town of Plymouth now stands. They are known in history as the "Pilgrim Fathers." 3. Those who would not conform to the ritual of the Established Church of England, and professed great purity of life, as well as doctrine, were called Puritans, in derision.

L. B. H.—The University of Paris was the first institution to which the term university was applied. It was suppressed in 1793. It was succeeded by the University of France, which is still maintained. Of nearly equal antiquity with the University of Paris is that of Bologna, which attained fame as a law-school under Innocent early in the 12th century. The first named owed its early celebrity to the teachings of William of Champeaux, who taught logic in Paris in 1109, and of Abelard, his pupil and rival. About 1200 the French schools were largely resorted to by the English students, but by the middle of the 13th century the University of Oxford, established in 1231, was second only to that of Paris.

E. D. W.—It is almost impossible to give the real size of London, because there is now no boundary wall, nor any definite number of surrounding parishes and villages included within it. What was known as the old "London within the walls," the original city, comprised only 370 acres, and "London without the walls," 230 acres. In addition to these portions, there is the city of Westminster and the borough of Southwark, the "lower Hamlets," a large number of northern and western suburbs, many parishes in the centre, but westward of the city, &c. The Post Office, London, is larger than the Parliamentary London, and the Police

London is larger than either. At the present day, however, it is usual to take as the limit of this great city the area under the operation of what is called the "Metropolis Local Government Act." As defined by this Act, its area is equal to 122 square miles. In round numbers, the dimensions of London may be estimated at about thirteen miles from east to west, and nine-and-a-half from north to south. Within these bounds are included portions of the four counties of Middlesex, Essex, Surrey, and Kent.

L. D.—We strongly advise you to abstain from all kinds of practical jokes, and to indicate to the young gentleman who is fond of that sort of fun that you disapprove of everything of the sort. Practical jokes often lead to unpleasant results.

G. V. W.—The venerable Bede states that the Angles came from the peninsula, the northern extremity of which now forms the kingdom of Denmark. The Saxons came from what is now Holstein, the Angles occupied the territory farther north, forming the middle part of the peninsula, and the Jutes held the northern extremity still known as Jutland. Your derivation of Anglo-Saxon is right.

ALINE.—You should send your own photograph to the young lady before asking her for hers. Your supposition that she puts the postage stamp on the left side of the letter, instead of on the right, for the purpose of conveying some peculiar meaning, is probably far-fetched. A great many people put the postage stamp on the left side of a letter simply because they have got in the habit of doing so.

F. E. G.—Egg-nogg is composed of the following ingredients: Six eggs (whites and yolks beaten separately and very stiff), one quart of rich milk, half a cup of sugar, half a pint of the best brandy, and sufficient nutmeg to flavour nicely. Stir the yolks into the milk with the sugar, which should be first beaten with the yolks, then add the brandy, and lastly whip in the whites of three eggs, reserving the remainder for the purpose of placing upon the top of the mixture, as an ornament.

T. R. S.—Your parents probably have good reasons for their objections to your sweethearts, and your proper course is to submit to them. Although you do not say so, we think we may assume that you are both very young, so that you can afford to wait, and the delay will be a valuable test of the worth and can tancy of your two lovers. The engagement and marriage ring are both usually worn on the finger next the little finger of the left hand. The engagement ring is sometimes worn on the forefinger, but many regard this as in bad taste.

H. A.—Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor of Rome, was born in 272 or 274 A.D. In 311 he became master of the western part of the Empire, and in 323 ruler of the eastern part as well. Constantine assembled the first general council of the church at Nicea in 325, and made Constantinople his capital. His mother's name was Helena; his wife's name was Fausta. He died in 337. Washington Irving died on Nov. 23, 1859. Our version of the Bible was made during the reign of King James I. of England, who reigned over Scotland from 1567, and over England as well from 1603 until his death in 1625.

A. B. S.—Zenobia was the daughter of an Arab chief, and flourished in the latter half of the third century. She became Queen of Palmyra in the year 266, and afterwards assumed the title of Queen of the East. She resisted the encroachments of Rome, and maintained her power for six years. She was then defeated and captured by the Emperor of Aurelian. In her defeat she showed the native treachery of her race by sacrificing her prime minister, Longinus, the celebrated Greek critic and philosopher, to the vengeance of Aurelian. It is conceded by all the authorities that Zenobia was exceedingly beautiful and unusually accomplished. She spoke Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Egyptian, and wrote an epitome of oriental history for her own use. She was a splendid rider on horseback, and fond of field sports, as a daughter of the desert would be expected to be. She also had the toughness and courage of a veteran warrior, and sometimes marched on foot at the head of her troops to set them an example of patience and endurance. Aurelian carried her to Rome, and gave her a splendid villa on the banks of the Tiber, where she passed the residue of her life.

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